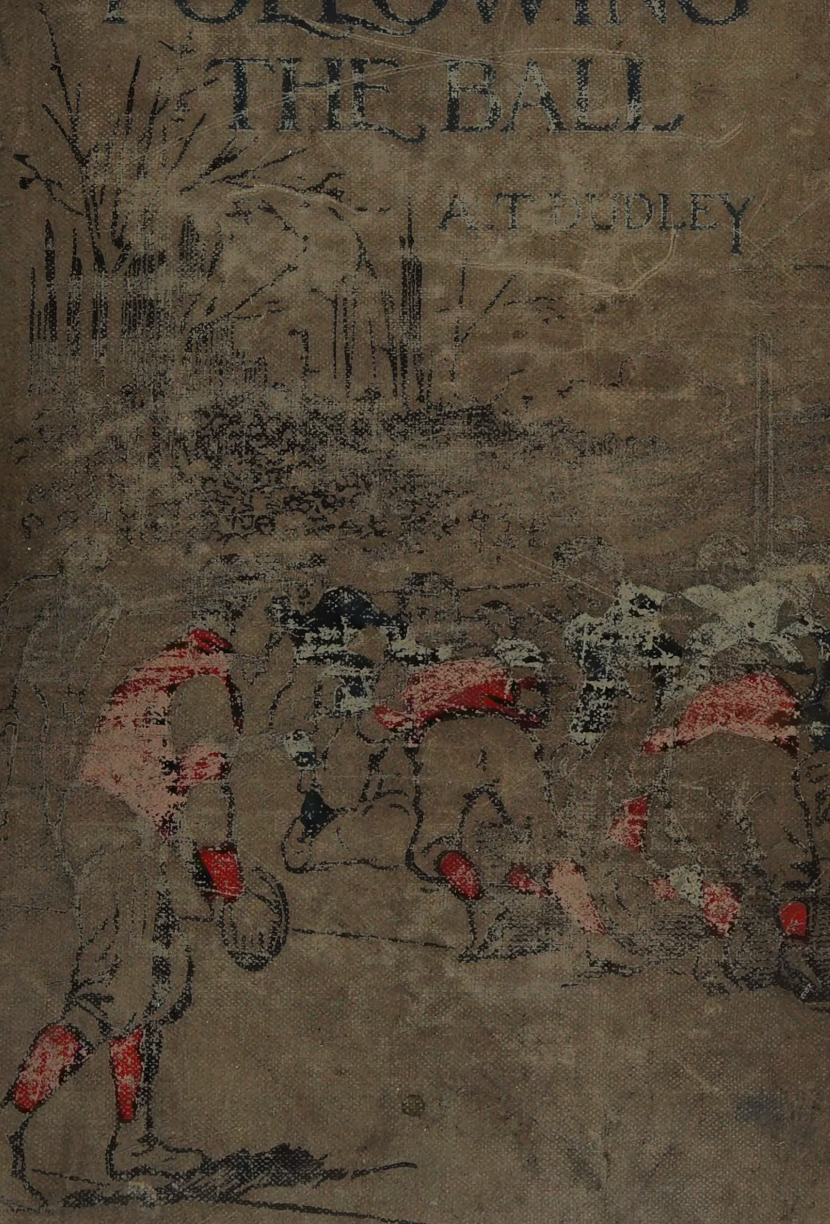
FOLLOWING THE BALL

A. T. DUDLEY



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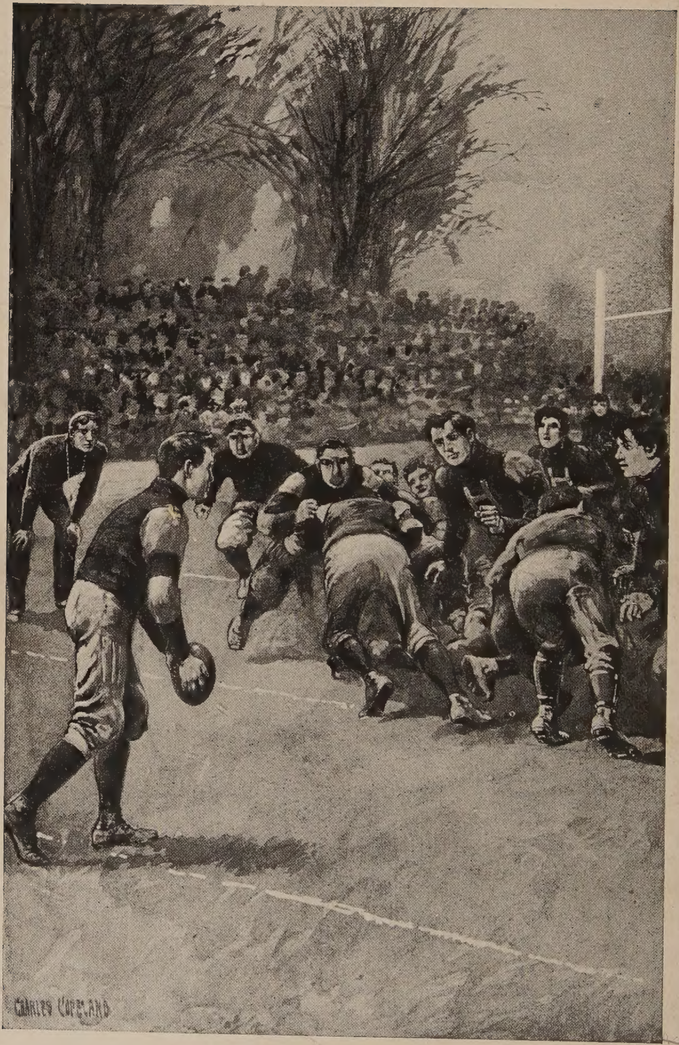
CHARLES COPELAND

"HE IS GOING TO TRY FOR A GOAL" — Page 298

PHILLIPS EXETER SERIES

FOLLOWING THE BALL

BY

ALBERTUS T. DUDLEY

ILLUSTRATED BY CHARLES COPELAND

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To

G. W. C. NOBLE

A SCHOOLMASTER OF THE FINEST TYPE

Admired and Loved

BY TWO GENERATIONS OF BOYS

INTRODUCTION

This is a story of an American boy at an American school, where it is not considered necessary that pupils should study under inaccessible windows or sleep in cubicles, or play English games under a master's clumsy though kindly tuition. Whatever be their faults, the schools founded by our forefathers may still boast certain advantages which the more fashionable importations do not possess, — the higher standard of scholarship; the training in self-reliance and in bearing responsibility; the cosmopolitan character possible only where students gather from every quarter of the country; the democratic life in which rich and poor meet on equal terms and only personal merit wins distinction.

Many of the incidents of the story are based on fact, being drawn from a long list covering a score of years. The characters, however, are only typically real, and all description of actual persons has been carefully avoided.

For the instruction in kicking, in Chapter XXII, the writer owes much to Mr. Percy D. Haughton, of the Harvard coaching staff, an acknowledged master of the theory and practice of punting. Mr. Haughton has kindly read the proof and made very welcome suggestions.

While football has a prominent place in the story, the writer's object is something far beyond a mere glorification of sport. In the development of the schoolboy's character and ability, a school brings many forces to bear, some through books and teachers, others through the life and spirit and interests of the students themselves. It is among these latter influences which are often powerful for good or ill that athletics play an important part.

ALBERTUS T. DUDLEY.

Boston, 1903.

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FOLLOWING THE BALL

CHAPTER I

ON THE WAY

THE train for Seaton, whither Dick Melvin was bound, left Boston at one o'clock. To save his sleeping-car fare, he had travelled the night before in a day coach, and now, on the second day of his journey, he felt tired, stupid, and a little discouraged — hardly the proper frame of mind for one who had so boldly turned his back on his Western home to win his way in an Eastern school. The cars were already pretty full when he got aboard, and he was glad to slip quietly into a seat beside a young woman in spectacles who concerned herself with nothing but the book before her. In the seat in front a middle-aged man had settled himself comfortably in the corner, with bag beside him, so as to present as formidable a barrier as possible to any intruder. Behind this intrenchment, with the afternoon paper spread out before his nose, as a kind of outer work which must first be stormed, he was tolerably safe from interruption. So at least thought Dick, who studied this type of experienced traveller with a growing feeling of disapproval.

Across the aisle sat four young men facing one another, who furnished a strong contrast to Dick's nearer neighbors. Noisy they certainly were, but happy and merry as larks, and offensive to none. Around and behind and above and below were their "things" — bags, coats, golf clubs, cameras, umbrellas, and whatever else the schoolboy equipment is wont to include, stacked in dreadful confusion among the knees or (to take literally a phrase from Virgil) threatening from above. It certainly looked inconvenient to be wedged in among a heap of traps like so many bottles packed in straw, but the boys gave hardly a thought to present discomfort. Their chief concern was for another of their party, for whom half an adjoining seat was reserved. There was much leaning out of windows and many vehement wonderings as to what was the matter with "Marty." All the time the car was filling up, people pouring in as if the train were loading an excursion party. Dick amused himself as he waited by distinguishing, among the boys who passed, the new ones from the old — a feat of no difficulty, as the strangers walked by soberly, giving but a shy, curious glance at the noisy quartette, while the others stopped for boisterous greetings, or at least dropped a nod and a grin and a "Hello, Ross!" or "How are you, Foxy?" as they hastened by.

The train was already moving when a big stout fellow, with a round chubby face topped with yellow hair and adorned with big, gold-rimmed spectacles, sauntered in and dropped into the vacant place. The volley of reproaches which his fellows fired at him did not dash him in the least; he was evidently not one to be easily abashed or readily turned from his path. He swung around toward the aisle as he talked with his companions over the seat, and much of his conversation was as distinctly audible to his neighbors as to those whom he addressed.

Before five minutes had passed Dick understood perfectly why the newcomer had been so anxiously awaited. He was a born entertainer. Without being precisely witty, or even aiming to be funny, he possessed a certain quaintness and originality of expression which, coupled with the glibness of his tongue and the droll solemnity of his face, gave a humorous turn to everything he said. The boys were talking now of Seaton, and Martin, — for such was the boy's name, — who knew the school like a book, and was posted on all the important anecdotes of the last half-dozen years, including most interesting details of real and apocryphal history, kept his companions in a roar. To have so much merriment close at hand and yet receive no part in it was hard. Dick listened and half understood, and felt his lonesomeness and ignorance the more.

The first stopping-place was twenty-five miles from Boston. Here a few got out, but more came in, and the train seemed fuller than ever. The elderly man in front of Dick, after guarding his seat till all real danger seemed past, ventured out upon the platform. Immediately afterward an awkward, clumsy working-girl, out of breath from hurrying, and blushing furiously at facing a carful of staring people, came edging along the aisle, whacking her big bundles at every step against the seat ends or her own knees. The vacant place in front of Dick appeared to her like a harbor of refuge. With a distinctly audible sigh of relief she dropped into it and began mopping her heated face.

The starting of the train brought the elderly man again. He looked a little crestfallen at the lumpy figure and the bundles, and then said, with an air of patient forgiveness: —

"That's my seat, if you please."

In desperate confusion the girl gathered her belongings under her arms and staggered a few steps down the aisle between cold, staring, selfish faces, then turned and leaned helplessly against the arm of a seat. So thoroughly overcome was Dick with indignation at the man's brutality that for a moment his own duty did not come home to him. Then he leaped to his feet, but big Martin was already before him.

"You may have my seat, madam," he said politely.

With a grateful look that went to Dick's heart the girl tumbled into the seat which Martin had just vacated. The student stopped to arrange her bundles, and then, wheeling about, tapped the elderly man on the shoulder.

"I'll trouble you to make room for me *here*."

The man looked up fiercely over his paper.

"One seat is all you are entitled to," continued Martin, coolly, as he deposited the bag on the floor and settled down in the vacant place. The student was unquestionably stout,—his friends even called him fat,—and when he was fixed in a comfortable position, Dick saw with satisfaction that he completely occupied his half of the seat. The experienced traveller had failed in his scheme of monopoly, and failed so obviously that he did not dare lift his eyes from his newspaper lest he catch the insolent grins of the witnesses of his defeat. And Dick sat the rest of the journey wondering why he had not done the thing instead of Martin, with his admiration for the student's courtesy and quick thought ever growing.

So it happened that, though he landed

at Seaton without a friend or acquaintance, the new boy had a hero already enshrined in his heart. Poor Dick! He was destined to learn that his hero had feet of clay.

CHAPTER II

MATRICULATION

A SLEEPY, dilapidated old place Seaton seemed, as Dick took his way to the Principal's office. Ambitious new houses, shabby old ones, and sombre and dignified mansions of the first quarter of the century were scattered promiscuously along the winding streets; and to the newcomer, who could not yet distinguish the decadent from the substantial in these plain, square fronts, the general effect was depressing. But the sun shone brightly, and the boy was too full of hope and expectation to yield to vague impressions.

At the Principal's house he was shown into the study, a large room lined with bookcases, where some of the new boys who had been his fellow-travellers had already arrived. Dick took his seat with tne rest and awaited his turn.

The Principal sat at a desk at the farther end of the room, talking with the boys as they came to him, one at a time. Mr. Graham was by no means the schoolmaster of the story-books, who usually possesses the opposite qualities of loving sweetness and awful sternness combined in some inexplicable way to the edification of simple-minded boys. On the contrary, Mr. Graham's brusqueness and directness of speech very frequently discouraged the good people who with fear and trembling left their dear ones at his feet. He was a middle-aged man above the usual height, his dark hair and beard already sprinkled with gray, with eyes that looked straight forward as though he feared no man and was abashed by none. The boys called him "Old Grim," and Dick, as he sat fearfully awaiting his turn, could not help feeling that the name was really very appropriate. But grim though he might be, he was unquestionably respected by boys of every age and kind throughout the great school. "Old Grim is a square man" had been said and believed for the last ten years, and as each boy had his own vague notion of what "square" meant, the sum total of good qualities attributed to the Principal by the school at large must have been considerable.

Dick's turn came in a few minutes. As he stood before the desk, Mr. Graham gave him a sharp, quick look.

"Your name?"

"Have you any letters?" Dick hastily produced the letter which Mr. Carleton, his father's friend, had given him. The Principal opened it, glanced at the three closely written pages, then at the name at the bottom, and then, with another glance at the boy, read the letter through to the end.

"I will keep this letter. How long have you known Mr. Carleton?"

"A good many years," answered Dick.

"If you turn out half so good a man as your sponsor, we shall be proud of you," said Mr. Graham. "Sit down here until I can get an opportunity to talk longer with you," and he motioned to the next in turn to present himself.

Meantime a stout, gaudily dressed woman had appeared, with a lad of sixteen following sheepishly after, as if he felt somewhat ashamed to be thus towed along in his mother's wake. As soon as Mr. Graham reached a pause in his short conversation with Melvin, the newcomer bustled directly up to the desk.

"I have come for the purpose of establishing my son in the academy," she said. "I suppose you are the man who receives the boys."

"I am the Principal," said Mr. Graham, curtly; "but as there are others who have been waiting some time to see me, I am afraid I must ask you to await your turn."

The mother seemed somewhat surprised at this, for she glared fiercely, first at the Principal and then at the boys, as if she did not fully comprehend the situation.

“Perhaps those next in turn may be kind enough to waive their privilege,” added Mr. Graham, who seemed to desire to get through the interview as soon as possible.

The lady on the right with the tall boy sitting beside her bowed slightly as the Principal glanced at her; and the newcomer immediately seized her opportunity.

“I am Mrs. Senator Argent of Arizona.”

“At what school was your son last?” asked the Principal, taking no apparent notice of the pompous assertion.

“He has been in a school in St. Louis,” said Mrs. Argent, “but they didn’t treat him well there, and I would not allow him to stay there any longer. I want him to go to Yale College next year.”

Mr. Graham turned to the boy and asked him a few questions.

“I doubt very much,” he finally said, “whether he can be got ready in a year — perhaps not in two. It will depend on what his instructors find him able to do.”

“If you can’t fit him for college, I presume I can take him somewhere else where they can do it," said the mother.

"Indeed, I should advise it," said Mr. Graham, calmly. "Some other school will probably be better for him. Here he would have to take his place with other boys and do the work the other boys do."

The Principal turned away, as if he felt that the last word had been said. But Mrs. Argent apparently thought otherwise, for she started again on a new tack.

"Can my son get comfortable rooms here?" she asked, looking around patronizingly on the furniture of the study. "I want them well furnished; we can pay for them."

"I can give you a list, Mrs. Argent, and you can examine for yourself; you will probably find people to charge you as high a price as you wish to pay."

"What would you rather do, Clarence?" asked Mrs. Argent of the apathetic-looking boy at her side, "have a tutor, or stay here?"

"I don't care," said Clarence; "I don't want to have to study too much, that's all; I might try it here for a while."

"Oh, but you'll have to study *some*, you know."

"My dear madam," now broke in Mr. Graham, "you must decide yourself about your son's course. My opinion is, decidedly, that it would be better for him to go elsewhere, but the choice lies with you. Here is a slip of paper on which are the addresses of several people who may satisfy you in respect to rooms; also the names of the instructors who must classify your son. I cannot well spare you another minute until you have made up your mind."

Mrs. Argent rose and took the paper. "We will think it over," she said, and swept out followed by the sheepish Clarence, who cast behind him a look of contempt at the waiting boys, as if he didn't care whether they had heard the conversation or not.

"I shall never see him again," thought Dick. But he was mistaken. Argent turned up in his own class at the very first recitation.

The lady who had surrendered her place to Mrs. Argent came next. She also had a son — a manly, well-bred boy who listened respectfully while his mother spoke, and seemed rather proud than otherwise to have her guidance. Her clothes were very plain, compared with Mrs. Argent's, and yet, in their simplicity and quiet style, they seemed to Dick in some strange way far nearer perfection. She spoke to Mr. Graham in a low voice, and much that she said did not reach Dick at all; but her sweet dignity and ease of manner charmed him and set him to wondering why she was so different from the other mother who had just gone out. Mr. Graham addressed her as Mrs. Thayer, and the boy had been in a New York school. More than this Dick did not gather during the short scene, but he made up his mind very definitely that he liked both the lad and his mother.

Then came more boys, some with mothers, some with fathers, many with neither, until Dick got very confused trying to make out the kind of fellows he was to live among. When the last one began to speak, Dick recognized a voice that he had heard in the car that morning.

"Well, Todd, weren't you notified that you were not to return?"

"Yes, sir," answered Todd, "but it was because I didn't do well enough in my studies. I've been working hard all summer, and I should like to ask to be examined on what I failed on last year."

The Principal eyed the boy critically. "It is not worth while for us to keep you here to shirk your work in term time and make it up during the summer. What guarantee should we have that you would do any better another year?"

"I'm going to try, sir, if you'll let me," said Todd, stoutly. "My father says if I can't do well here he won't send me anywhere else."

"Are you willing to take any conditions which we impose on you?"

"Oh, yes, sir. I'll do anything for another chance."

"I will consult the Faculty about the case." As Todd slipped away, with his face glowing with joy at the apparent success of his plea, Mr. Graham turned to Dick.

"Now, Melvin, I am at last ready for you. What class did Carleton think you could enter?"

"The middle class," answered Dick.

"And you want to go to college?"

"If I can."

"And you must earn your way, at least in part?"

"I can't stay here otherwise," replied the boy.

"Tell me your circumstances."

There was a kindly look lurking about "Old Grim's" stern eyes that drew Dick's confidence and loosened his tongue. Of course he stumbled and said the wrong things and forgot the important ones; but a few wise questions straightened him out, with the result that in ten minutes he was on his way in search of a room, feeling that Mr. Graham knew every essential fact in his history.

CHAPTER III

DICK MAKES THE TEAM

The room Dick finally selected was in a private house some distance from the halls. It was small and by no means elaborately furnished, but, as he soon found out, it provided a safe retreat for genuine work, while at the dormitories there was constant temptation to fritter time away. On the other hand, Dick sometimes found it hard to turn his back on his companions after supper at Carter, and push on to his own solitary nest for a full evening's work. There is always a depressing strangeness about one's first days in a new school, especially if school work involves something of a struggle for existence. Our young man felt the ache of homesickness, as other boys have done; and he met it as a brave boy should — by plunging with all his might into the work before him. He had to learn the ropes, get used to instructors and methods, and patch up as best he could the gaps left by previous faulty teaching; and this absorbed his time and attention to the exclusion of pretty much everything else.

Acquaintances, however, he made daily and without effort. Among the conspicuous members of his section were big John Curtis, the foot-ball player, and Todd, whom he had seen at the office, with Argent of Arizona, and Fletcher, who was working his way through school on nothing at all. With these and others he soon had a bowing acquaintance. Martin, too, came in for algebra — he had failed the subject at his preliminaries — but, except for a remarkable ability in getting through the recitation with the flimsiest preparation conceivable, he showed no very heroic traits. Still, one could hardly expect a hero to display himself in a recitation.

During the first few weeks, with all his work, Dick occasionally found his way to the Campus to watch the foot-ball practice. His first visit was made in company with loquacious little Marks whose voluble explanations, buried, as they were, in a profusion of unknown terms, were not wholly profitable. Curtis and Todd and Freeman, said Marks, were sure of the team, and so were two or three others whom Dick had never heard of.

"Who is the fellow that does so much talking?" asked Dick.

"That's Harper, the captain; he's a senior."

"Is he a very fine player?"

"Pretty fair; he blocks well and interferes pretty decently, but he can't tackle at all, and he's too old to learn. He's stuck on himself, too, — thinks he knows all there is to be known."

"Who is the fellow who made that kick? He seems to be the only man who kicks the ball at all."

"The full-back, you mean? Oh, that's

Homer. He's a senior, too. Safe enough for the team, I suppose, but I don't think much of him. Hasn't the sand, it looks to me. Ah! there goes old John; I tell you, he's the boy! No one can touch him on this field."

"Who?"

"Curtis, don't you know? John Curtis, in our class. He's the best player in the lot — as sure as death and steady as a house. If we had half a dozen like him, we'd beat Hillbury without trying."

"How big a school is Hillbury, anyhow?" asked Dick, who, during his life in school, had heard more about the Hillbury game than any other historical event.

"A little bigger than this, but not so good," said Marks, who, like most of his kind, was immensely patriotic.

"Do you always have a game with them?"

"Two every year — foot-ball in the fall and base-ball in the spring. We won both last year. Then there's the track meet, besides."

"Is it really such an honor to be on the team?"

"An honor? Well, I guess! That is, if you win. If you lose, it's a different thing. What's the matter now, I wonder; somebody must be hurt." And the good-natured Marks cut across the field to the place of excitement, only to find that the supposed injured man was again on his feet.

Dick was left to watch proceedings by himself. He had seen foot-ball games at home — what boy has not in these days? — but here the play was so earnest and businesslike, so much was felt to be at stake, and there were so many details and specialties, that it seemed a new kind of game. For a whole hour he puzzled over it, fascinated and envious. The next day he came again, and the next; the third day he resolutely held aloof, as if he were fighting a temptation. Then he came for several days in succession and watched and studied and questioned, until the general plan and something of the details were familiar to him. And as he watched and studied, the passion for the play grew within him, the longing to leap into the midst and try his strength of limb, his quickness of eye, and his fighting mettle with the rest. It was the natural impulse of the healthy boy, and it possessed Dick's heart with a hold which no argument would vanquish. It broke in on his studies, followed him to his recitations, and haunted his dreams.

At last he sounded Curtis on the subject.

"Come out? Why, of course come out, if you want to play," said Curtis. "It isn't too late, yet. What do you weigh?"

"About a hundred and fifty," said Dick.

"Did you ever play before?"

"Not regularly."

"Well, come along, anyway. I'll speak to Harper about you. Got a good pair of trousers?"

"I think my trousers will do, but I haven't a padded jersey."

"You want the pads, sure. I can lend

you something if it won't be too big. Let's see, can't you come around after dinner and try it? Come early, and we'll read the Greek together."

'Coming around' meant for Dick going way over to the other side of the town to Curtis's room, and 'reading Greek together' was simply pumping the lesson into Curtis's dull head, who, whatever his prowess on the field, cut a very sorry figure in the recitation room. But Dick was too much overjoyed at the prospect of trying the game to think of anything else. Here at last was his chance; if he could only do himself credit!

The spectators seemed unusually numerous that afternoon; but Dick did not mind them when once he had entered into the game. Harper set him to playing half-back on the second eleven, where he had all the opportunity to show his mettle that his heart could wish. And he succeeded, too; not phenomenally, but enough to give him encouragement and relieve him of his first feeling of awkwardness. The next day he did still better; his tackling was well commented on.

"You're doing finely, old man," said Curtis, after the second practice. "Only be sure in your tackling, and you'll learn the other things fast enough. Get your man by the knees, and he's got to drop."

"Do you think there'll be any chance for me?" asked Dick.

"If you could kick any, you might get full-back before the Hillbury game. Homer isn't very good. But there's more chance on the end; ask Harper to let you try there to-morrow."

So, on the next day, Dick began to play end. He was quick and energetic, and entered into the game with such intensity that his improvement was rapid. It was really a lucky chance, however, that gave him his greatest lift toward the team.

The X—— college game was very much dreaded by the Seaton boys. The college players were heavier and rougher, simply aiming to make as large a score and get as much practice as possible out of the academy lads. So it happened that for this game, which came this year in the fourth week of school, a larger number of substitutes than usual was chosen, and Dick was among them. He went to the Campus prepared to share in the contest, and wicked enough to hope that something might happen to bring such an event about. The much-desired opening came in the second half, when he was called to take the place of the substitute end who was playing that afternoon, and who, having lost by a fall both breath and courage, was compelled to retire.

The score stood 46 to 0, with but ten minutes more to play. Our hero burned with zeal to make some telling stroke. Along came three college men, one with the ball under his arm, the other two just before him. "The man with the ball!" shouted John, as he plunged into the first collegian and forced him aside. Dick heard, understood, dodged the interference, and flung himself at the knees of the runner, who fell like a log. It was well played, the spectators cheered, and the lad's courage rose. The ball was Seaton's. Homer punted away down the field. The college full-back waited to catch it, thinking much of the start he meant to get for a quick run up the field, and little of the schoolboy end who was tearing down upon him. Homer himself sometimes nods, and college veterans are not always on their mettle. The ball slipped through the full-back's hands, and Dick, green, inexperienced player that he was, caught the ball on the bounce, and, dodging the X—— half-back, fell upon it between the enemy's goal-posts.

To say that there was excitement on the field then is to put it very mildly. If our friend was not a hero that night when the whole school learned that Seaton had scored against the College and that Melvin had made the touchdown, he certainly never came so near it in his life. That was Wednesday; the next morning, for the first time since he entered the school, Dick went to recitation feeling that he had not given much attention to the lesson. His conscience smote him somewhat, but he put it easily to rest; he had improved so much of late that he could afford to slight a single lesson.

From this time on Melvin appeared as a regular member of the school team. Curtis congratulated him on his luck, and Dick knew in his heart that chance had borne the chief part in his preferment. Among his schoolfellows, however, there was no uncertainty. "Melvin is the man for right end," said public opinion, and public opinion prevailed.

Succeeding games brought no such opportunity for glory, though his playing was always vigorous and hard. As the weeks passed and the tenth of November drew near, the importance of the great match grew upon him. His patriotic zeal increased.

He found himself more often slighting lessons and thinking more and more about his playing. Fletcher was far ahead of him now, — he could see that,— and two or three others whom, in the earlier days of the term, he had hoped to outrank. "I'll catch up again after to-morrow," thought Dick, the day before the great game. "I'll give my whole time to it when once this is off my mind; no doubt I can get along some way."

CHAPTER IV

SIX TO NOTHING

SATURDAY morning came with dubious weather prospects. Dick awoke from a dream in which brilliant personal achievements in foot-ball were strangely mingled with visions of home faces and successful recitations. At breakfast — the team had been at a table by themselves during the last fortnight — there was not much said among the players. Various conjectures were made as to the weather, the number likely to come on the excursion train from Hillbury, and the probable ability, impartiality, and strictness of referee and umpire; but there was little interest in any conversation. Their minds were full of the subject, but they seemed not to care to talk about it.

"I wonder what Grim will give us this morning," said John, as the group was on its way to chapel. "He always says something that strikes in, and he's usually pretty near right, too."

"What about?" asked Dick.

"What about? Why, the game, you simple," said Martin, "and fellows who are going to play, and what they should be and what not. He'll probably say that 'wise men came from the East,' but only politicians and quitters from Ohio."

"Oh, come, don't begin on that to-day!" exclaimed John. "It's a serious matter with the rest of us, if not with you." And then he turned to Dick: "Don't pay any attention to what he says; he's just talking through his hat. He wants us to think he isn't afraid; the Hillbury man will settle him."

"That's all right," rejoined Martin, unmoved. "Maybe he will and maybe he won't, but I've been there before, anyway. All the same, you'd better keep an eye on the greaser."

They entered the chapel amid a strange

and uneasy buzz of whispering voices, just as the last strokes of the bell were heard. All through the exercises this restlessness was apparent, as if the whole school were writhing under a burden of anxiety for the day's contest. When, however, the Principal began to speak on the all-important subject, silence instantly reigned.

The speech was characteristically short and to the point. He assured the school of his sympathy with them in the day's event. He hoped that the team might win their victory, or, better still, had already earned it. They were to remember that they were gentlemen welcoming the members of a sister school upon the Seaton grounds. For the day their opponents were their guests, to be treated with the generosity, kindness, and courtesy due to guests. "And whatever be the outcome of the contest," he said in closing, "I want you to share with me this sentiment: No defeat is disgraceful if after it we can say, 'We have done our best'; no victory is glorious unless honestly won by genuine superiority and after a hard struggle."

"What did he mean by saying that he hoped we had already earned the victory?" asked Dick of Curtis, as they came out of the Greek recitation an hour later.

"He meant you among others," answered Curtis, with a queer look on his face, half jesting, half earnest.

"Well, we're pretty sure to win, anyway, whether we've earned it or not," went on Dick, disregarding the personal reflection.

"Oh, we are, are we? Then I'll tell you exactly what he meant. He meant that we are mighty sure to lose if we think, like you, we are going to beat without half trying. If every one talks as you do, we'll be beaten as sure as guns."

"But they haven't any kind of a team compared with ours."

"Where did you get that idea? You think you're sure to get ahead on your end, you greenhorn! I'll bet the man opposite you will run right by you."

"They don't often do it," said Dick, with assurance.

"Oh, they don't!" retorted Curtis. "Didn't little Tommy Brooks, who is only a Prep, go right by you yesterday? I don't see much myself from my place in the line, but I saw that."

"I really wasn't half trying," answered Dick, confusedly, "and some one held me, too."

Curtis burst out in a derisive hoot: "They held him and he wasn't half trying! Poor little fellow, how could they treat him so! The Hillbury man won't do a thing to you."

Dick was indignant. Whatever might be thought of his playing, there was certainly no excuse for sitting on him in that fashion. And why should anything of the kind be said to him, who, as all the school said, was one of the best new men on the team? Hadn't his tackling always been praised by the "Seatonian"? And hadn't he made the only touchdown the school had ever made against X—— College? Curtis was evidently jealous because a new fellow got more praise than he did. It simply showed a mean spirit that he wouldn't have thought John Curtis capable of. The game would tell the tale, anyway, and when the game was over, he'd let Curtis know just what he thought of him.

No one seemed in a disposition for study that morning. In spite of all his confidence in the team and himself, Dick was affected by the general uneasiness that possessed the school. Students gathered in little knots here and there over the school grounds to talk nervously and apprehensively over the familiar subject; others strolled by twos and threes about the streets. Every one provided himself with a red ribbon or some more elaborate badge of school patriotism. Some appeared in blazing red ties; some got canes wound with alternate stripes of red and gray, others gray hats with broad crimson bands. Report said that one boy had a red coat with gray trousers, peculiarly striped, which he was going to don, while another proposed to grace the occasion with a red-blanketed dog. The drygoods stores and millinery shops proved hardly equal to the demands upon them.

So the morning passed in discussion and preparation. Every now and then the sun would appear to encourage the hopeful and brighten the despondent, and then, after a brief glance at the anxious Seatonians, plunge deep into the clouds again. This uncertainty as to the weather furnished fresh material for debate. Was it going to rain, and would rain increase or diminish Seaton's chances? Toward noon old students and college boys began to arrive and take a patronizing part in the discussions.

Amidst such general excitement Dick was at a loss to amuse himself. Never before had the time dragged in such a depressing way. To join one of the discussing groups was impossible; he was heartily sick of hearing this everlasting repetition of the same hopes and fears. The comic papers in the reading room were soon exhausted. He could not study; it bored him to read; he must not do anything which might weaken him for the struggle of the afternoon. At last, in despair, he sat down at his table and began a letter to his father. He wrote as a boy naturally would, who is sure of paternal sympathy and love, about that which filled his mind at the moment, the game and its importance to the school, and then of his own place in it and how well he hoped to play — and more of the same sort. Dinner-time came with the letter still unfinished. "After the game I'll finish," said Dick to himself, as he put the sheets aside; "I shall have something to tell, then."

A little before two the special train brought the representatives of Hillbury, almost all the school — all, in fact, whom sickness or dire poverty did not keep at home — resplendent with blue ribbons and banners. A few ladies had had the courage to follow their favorites into the enemy's country, and wore unmistakable badges of their sympathies. The main body of the visitors went immediately to the grounds, where they took possession of the side of the field allotted to them, flooding the grandstand, and stretching in solid masses along the side ropes. On the other side were ranged the Seaton students, backed by a solid phalanx of townspeople, who showed their confidence in the Seaton team by turning out in full force. Under the coats and in the great ulster pockets of some of the Seaton boys, a trained eye might have discovered oblong bunches, which betokened the presence of horns — a very good index of the prevailing feeling. The Hillbury boys seemed quieter and less inclined to merriment; but if one could have heard them as they talked together, he would have found no sense of following a forlorn hope among the Hillbury supporters.

The Seaton team was the first to arrive, amid a perfect volley of cheers from five hundred eager impetuous throats. The players scattered over the field, passing the ball from hand to hand, warming themselves for a vigorous beginning. Almost behind them appeared their antagonists, running briskly upon the field, where they soon lined up and went rapidly through their signals against an imaginary foe. Full of curiosity, Dick stopped his passing and turned to watch the blue uniforms now scurrying down the field. The men seemed big and lively, and, with their abilities still unproved, more formidable than he had imagined them. Perhaps they really were stronger than the Seaton team! The thought took hold of him like a fit of sickness, suddenly sapping both his strength and his courage. For a moment he was like the raw recruit on his first battle-field, who longs to throw away his gun and flee.

"For Heaven's sake, Melvin, brace up!" broke in Harper's voice, roughly. "Don't stand there gaping like a fool; one would think you were afraid of them. Can't you see we're waiting?"

In a moment the spell was broken.

Shamefaced and determined, Dick hurried to his place in the line. "No, I'm not afraid," he muttered to himself, "and I'll show him I'm not, too, before the day is over!"

And now preliminaries are ended. "Off with your sweaters!" shout the captains, and cheer on cheer greets the players as they take their places in the line ready for the word. "Play!" cries the referee, and the game begins.

Seaton has the kick-off. The Hillbury boys wait with muscles strained. For a moment there is a pause, then the ball goes sailing in a big arch overhead, while the Seaton forwards stampede down the field. The Hillbury full-back makes a catch, and under the lee of the other backs regains a dozen yards of lost territory, and then, falling, is instantly buried under a pile of red legs and gray bodies. But he is on his feet in a moment, the lines form, signals are rattled off, a back plunges at the centre which breaks and lets the runner through a dozen yards. The next attempt yields nothing, and Hillbury kicks away down the field, dropping the ball where there seems the strongest possibility that her opponents will miss it. But Homer, the Seaton full-back, is ready to receive it, and, as he catches it, skilfully dodges his nearest enemy and plants it twenty yards ahead, when the Seaton team takes its turn in trying to push forward.

And so back and forth goes the ball, it is impossible to remember exactly how or where — sometimes in Hillbury's hands, sometimes in Seaton's. Now they run with it, now they kick it, now in a mass they force it along. Now a player drops it and another throws himself upon it, as it rolls along the ground; now again one emerges miraculously from a confusion of flashing legs with it in his arms. Every gain, every loss is carefully noted by the anxious spectators, who are kept jumping from elation to despair, and despair to elation, with a very exhausting frequency. The time for the intermission comes, and no score has been made.

For ten minutes there is a rest. It is a closer game than was anticipated. The spectators stand in excited groups discussing the situation, the Seatonians somewhat despondent, the Hillbury boys alert and smiling but very cautiously hopeful. The next half will certainly show a battle royal!

The game begins again. Now is Seaton's chance, with players fresh and Hillbury kicking off. But at the first down the half-back fumbles and the ball goes to the other side. Down the field Hillbury begins to move, a few yards at a time, but very steadily and carefully. Once or twice Seaton gets the ball, but it is soon lost again. Harder and harder grows the struggle, and greater and greater becomes the excitement on the benches. Will they *never* stop going backward? Why don't Curtis and Martin and Harper break through and get the ball? They *must* make an effort, or they are lost. But

Curtis and Martin and Harper do not respond to the wishes of their friends. Struggling, panting, frantic with their efforts, they still fall back, now within a dozen yards of their goal-line. Suddenly the Hillbury half-back with the ball darts toward Dick's end of the line. Crazed with excitement, Dick makes a wild lunge at the runner, who dodges quickly and passes him; and as the Seaton end falls forward on his knees from the violence of his effort, he hears the maddening cheer from the left, which tells all too plainly that the ball is across the line.

A touchdown! and made around his end, the post he had expected so gloriously to guard! Can he ever retrieve himself?

The goal is kicked and play is resumed in the centre of the field. There is yet time to make good the loss. The spectators still cherish the hope that the team will rally. The men understand the situation and struggle desperately to retrieve themselves; but what they did not do with the chances even, they cannot now accomplish against odds. Fight as they may, the Seatonians can but hold their own, and time is called with the ball still far from either goal.

Dick turned and gazed curiously at the wild mass of Hillburyites bearing their heroes from the field; then he glanced at the silently dispersing crowd on the right.

As he stood there alone, little Marks tapped him on the arm:—

"Too bad!" said he. "They were too much for you, weren't they? You played your end well, anyway!"

But Dick shook his head. The game was lost, and he had helped to lose it.

CHAPTER V

THROWN

THAT letter to his father Dick burned unfinished, writing in its stead the briefest kind of an account. The thought of the assurance with which he had written before the game was very distasteful to him now. To be on the eleven was not much of an honor when the eleven had been beaten; indeed, there were fellows who did not hesitate to declare that they had never expected *that* team to win; they had known all along that it wasn't good for much. The players met together and elected Curtis captain for next year.

Now that the foot-ball season was past, there were other things requiring attention. The end of the term was drawing near — the time for the distribution of prizes and scholarships, the time also for what was of much more importance to some — the summary decapitation of those who were not considered worth keeping longer. So the school took seriously to study, the better scholars for prizes, the lazy for the privilege of returning after Christmas. And Dick, as his annoyance over the game passed away, found himself face to face with a greater trouble still: those six weeks of sport which had afforded him so much pleasure and ended in such bitter disappointment had left him desperately behind in the competition for a scholarship.

The final day came, and the boys gathered in the chapel for the few formalities of closing. The prizes were assigned, and the scholarship list was read; Dick's name was not mentioned.

He took no part in the merry clamor as the crowd scattered from the chapel to come together soon after at the railroad station. The words of farewell and good cheer for the holidays, as his more intimate friends bade him adieu, were hard to say; and when Fletcher, to whom he had confided his hopes and fears, whispered sympathetically: "I'm awful sorry, Melvin! I hope it won't prevent your coming back next term," Dick could hardly keep back the tears. He shook his head doubtfully, and passed on away from the boisterous, jubilant crowd.

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The boys once gone, a gloom seemed to settle on the old town, adding to his homesickness and despondency. He must write to his father that he had failed — what a poor return it was for his father's sacrifices! Very likely he would have to leave school. This thought was painful enough, but worse still was the feeling that the failure had been quite unnecessary. If he had been content to work steadily along in the regular path, it need never have happened, for many of the fellows who now ranked above him he honestly felt had less ability than he.

Next morning he was disposed to look at

the matter more philosophically: "I'll stay if I can, and try to retrieve myself," he decided; "if I can't, I shall have to go, that's all, and it does no good to whine about it. I wonder what Old Grim thinks. I'll go and sound him."

Mr. Graham received him kindly. "As it's vacation time, I take it that this is a friendly call," he said. "I don't have as many of this kind as I might wish."

"Not exactly, sir," returned Dick. "I'm in trouble about not getting a scholarship, and I thought I had better consult you about it."

"Were you in sore need of it?"

"I don't yet know whether I can stay without it or not. Did I fall so very far below the rest?"

"Oh, no; the general feeling among your teachers was that you were merely less deserving. You ought yourself to know best of all wherein you failed."

"I don't pretend to have done my best, sir; I know I haven't, but it is hard to lose a thing when you are counting on it to keep you in school."

"Well, Melvin," said the Principal, gravely, "I must say that I do not sympathize very strongly with you. I am always sorry for a hard-working boy who fails from sheer lack of ability, even when I tell him very bluntly, as I sometimes am compelled to do, that his ambitions are beyond his powers. In your case, it was the general opinion that you did not honestly and earnestly try, but were content to shirk your work every now and then, and trust vaguely to the future for some opportunity of making good what you had lost. I have followed you in your life here more closely perhaps than you have thought, and I confess I don't much care how hard you find your disappointment. You may depend on it that if you want success, you must work and work hard; in school or out, you will never get full pay for half work."

"I plead guilty to all that, sir," said Dick, gloomily. "I can see the fault as clearly as you do. But isn't there some other chance for me? I think I've learned something by this experience."

After a moment's thought Mr. Graham replied: "There is a chance, but you will have to exert yourself to make it anything more than a chance. There are usually one or two open scholarships at the end of the second term, but they are never given except in recognition of marked improvement."

This was poor comfort. "That would not help me, now," said the boy, sadly. "If my father can't help me any more, I must go home."

"Have you heard from him yet?"

"I expect a letter in a few days."

"Well, let me know about your plans before you decide to leave us; I should be sorry to have you forced to go. Good morning."

"The old fellow is right," thought Dick, bitterly, as he took his way homeward, "but he needn't have rubbed it in so hard; I knew it well enough."

But he didn't know that the Principal muttered, as he watched the retreating figure, "He's a promising boy, after all; we cannot afford to lose him."

A day or two after, as Dick sat in his room with a book, waiting impatiently for news from home, there was a loud knock at the door. "Come in!" he cried, and the big form of Curtis loomed up in the doorway.

"Why, hello, John! I thought you had gone."

"No!" answered the visitor, "I've got to stay here this vacation — family are all South. They forgot to send me any money, or I'd go up to Boston and stay. What are you doing?"

"Oh, not much of anything," answered Dick. "I've been reading some of Dickens's novels, and I go to the gym once a day, and that's about all."

"I just heard to-day that you were here. I want to have a talk with you."

"What's up?"

"Oh, nothing new. It's about foot-ball for next year. I'll tell you what, Dick,"—Curtis spoke very earnestly,—"we've got to win that game next fall."

"Some one may have my place," was the sullen answer. "I've had all I want to do with foot-ball."

Curtis laughed. "Still smarting, eh? You'll get over that in time."

"It isn't the defeat alone; there are other things."

"For instance?"

"Well, I didn't make much of a success of it last fall; a lot of fellows think it was I who lost the game."

"Nonsense! who told you that?"

"Oh, I heard of it."

"And you are going to let that kind of talk keep you from playing again? Dick, you're a fool!"

"Well, I won't be one again."

"Come, now, listen to me just a minute. We lost the last game—I think I know why—it wasn't your fault and it wasn't mine. But we're going to win the next one, and we're going to make a beginning this very next term. There'll be just two on the team to start with — you and I, and as fast as we find the right fellows to take hold with us, we'll take them in. Then at the end of the year we shall have half a dozen fellows banded together and bound to win. About your playing ability you can rest easy; I shouldn't come after you if I didn't want you."

Dick hesitated, apparently half convinced, then said: "It's no use, John, I can't do it. There's nothing I should enjoy more than taking hold with you to beat those fellows thoroughly, but it isn't likely that I shall be here next year, or next term, either."

"You don't mean it!"

"I'm sorry to say, I do. I counted on a scholarship to help me through. I've lost it and shall probably have to go home."

John gave a long whistle. "You *must* stay," he cried; "we need you like sixty. I had counted on you to take Homer's place."

"I wish I could, John, but the chances are certainly against me. I've been to see Grim, and he sat all over me."

Curtis rose and began walking back and forth across the room.

"You can't think, Dick," he said, after a while, "how sorry I am to hear this. I've never flattered you about your playing, or told you what I thought of you, for fear you would get too cocky. And that day when I roughed you so, it was only a kind of warning which I thought would do you good. But I've been counting on you right along, and I'd rather now lose all the seniors on the team than have you desert me."

Melvin reached out and took the captain's hand. It was the first touch of feeling John Curtis had ever shown.

"I'm as sorry as you," said Dick, simply; "but the thing seems absolutely impossible."

And the two parted in gloom.

That night Dick's mail contained two letters. One was from his father, and he opened it with trembling hands, and read with growing humiliation to the end. If he had expected any reproof, he was mistaken. Mr. Melvin was too kind for that; he simply expressed surprise that his son should fail to do himself and his family full credit, then, promising to keep him at Seaton as long as it should be possible, he devoted the rest of the letter to the little scraps of news and loving messages of family and friends, which he knew would help to make the solitude of the vacation endurable.

"He is the best man living!" exclaimed the boy, as he threw the letter on his table, "but I won't take advantage of his generosity. I'll go home and go to work."

The other letter was from Carleton; Dick recognized the writing immediately. The first part was mainly generalities, — football, school memories, congratulations; the rest made his eyes shine. It ran thus: —

"You remember my sister, Mrs. Poole, who lives in Virginia. Her little son, Philip Carleton, is now thirteen years old, and she has been casting about for a Northern school in which to place him. I want him to go to Seaton sometime, and there can be no better time than while you are there to look after him. So we have decided to send him, on condition that you will undertake the care of him during his first year, at least. He is somewhat behind his class, so you will have to coach him if you are willing and can find the time. I trust you are not above earning a substantial sum by these means, and will undertake the charge without demurring. The boy is well disposed and tractable, though shy and proud. If you agree to this proposal, show this letter to Mr. Graham, make what arrangements are necessary for putting the boy into the school, find a room for him near yours, and telegraph me. I will write you further in a day or two.

"Always sincerely yours,

"ROBERT CARLETON."

Dick threw himself on the sofa almost in tears. It seemed an act of Providence. The way was open now; he could stay and redeem himself. He would make a fight for the foot-ball, too, though he couldn't give it much time this year; and he would do his best by the little Prep, Carleton could depend on that, God bless him! There was one man besides his father who hadn't lost faith in him, if Grim had!

CHAPTER VI

A PASSING INCIDENT

Philip was soon installed in one of Mrs. Hayward's most comfortable rooms, ready to begin his work with the new term. His mother, in her letter to Dick, had said, "Whatever may be his faults, I am sure you will always find him, in intent at least, a gentleman, and can always appeal to his honor." And a little gentleman he proved to be, after the true Southern type, slow and deliberate in speech and movement, but quick as a flash to resent any slight to himself or friends; simple and trusting to a wonderful degree, yet with an independence of judgment very unusual in a boy of thirteen. He was such a friendly, easy-going lad that one hardly expected to find him possessed of the strong opinions which occasionally led to violent outbursts against those who held opposite views. On the subject of the civil war and his native state he was particularly sensitive; his patriotism was of the most militant kind.

The new term brought another change, also, in our hero's surroundings. Martin, for some reason or other, gave up his old lodgings and took a room with Mrs. Hayward.

"Why, Martin, what are you doing here?" Dick exclaimed, on seeing him come out of Mrs. Hayward's best room. "Changed your quarters?"

"Yes!" answered Martin, shortly.

"How could you do it? I thought it wasn't allowed."

"Not under ordinary circumstances, nor to ordinary fellows. Grim and I agree that the benefit of my presence ought not to be confined the whole year to one locality."

"Did he really want you to change?" Dick went on innocently, feeling sure that Martin would not come over to that part of the town without good reason.

"Of course," answered Martin. "Do you think I should be here if he didn't? There were reasons, too," he added with an air of mystery.

"What?" Dick's curiosity was aroused.

"He was afraid my health might give way under hard study down there in the valley, while up here I should be sure of fresh air — and very fresh companionship."

And with that the interview was at an end.

Curtis listened with a grin to a report of the conversation.

"He's roasted you," he said.

"That's apparent even to me," returned Dick, ruefully; "but why should he be so mysterious about it all?"

"Why, he doesn't want to be asked why he had to change his room any more than you would want to be asked why you didn't get a scholarship. He'd have told you in the beginning if he had meant to tell you at all. Either he's in some kind of a scrape already, or Grim's afraid he'll get into one, and thinks he'll be safer at Hayward's. Is she particular about reporting?"

"She locks up every night at ten; I don't believe she has failed once. Reports like clockwork."

"Oh, then, it is plain enough. The Faculty think he needs looking after, that's all. Probably he's on probation, too."

Dick asked no more questions, but it was soon clear that Martin was on probation, or at any rate felt it necessary to be in his room every evening at seven — a very sure sign of some restraint. Beyond this nothing could be learned. Martin was just the same on one day as on another — always lazy, good-natured, and keen, keeping constant open house for his friends. It was a wonder that he succeeded in doing any studying at all, with these loungers about at all times — some of them pretending to work, some there for no purpose other than to waste a half hour. No one seemed for a moment to imagine that Martin ever had any work to do.

The relations between Philip and Martin were peculiar. At first, as a senior, Martin occupied in the little fellow's mind a position of dignity and wisdom even a pitch above Dick himself. But this did not last long. Philip was proud and sensitive, and Martin found it amusing to arouse the wrath of the fiery little Southerner. After a few encounters with the older student, the boy's admiration changed to suspicion and then to dislike. One day the climax was reached.

"I say, Prep," sang out Martin, as the boy ran up the stairs, "come in here!" Philip stopped at the door. "Didn't you tell me the other day that you were only ten years old?"

"No, I didn't," answered Phil, stoutly. "I said thirteen."

"Thirteen!" opening his eyes. "My stars! you don't mean it. You must belong to a small race."

"Well, I don't," said Phil, getting angry. "My father was six feet tall and a very handsome man, too."

"That accounts for your pretty face," said Martin; "you look sweet enough to kiss."

That was the last straw. Philip rushed up to Dick in angry tears, vowing he never would speak to the big brute again.

"Oh, come, Philip!" said Dick, when he had heard the grievance. "Don't get so excited over a little thing like that. You mustn't mind Martin's chaffing."

"He's no gentleman, anyway, or he wouldn't say such things. I'd just like to see the kind of a man *his* father is."

"But he was only joking you, Phil, as he jokes every one. It was unkind of him, I think myself, but you won't help matters any by getting angry; try not to notice him."

"If I was as big as you, he wouldn't try his jokes on me more than once. I'd call him out."

Dick laughed. "We don't do such things up here, Philip."

One morning in January, as he was getting ready for the noon recitation, Dick found that he needed a solution of a problem that he had lent to Martin the day before. From his room in the third story at the head of the stairs to Martin's room at their foot there was a straight stretch of banisters, which he often used in descending. By this route Dick presented himself at Martin's door without a sound of warning, knocked, and entered abruptly. There was a rustling of paper as he opened the door and Martin appeared standing.

"Are you through with that problem, Martin?"

"Yes, there it is on the table; much obliged for it."

"Is that the morning paper?" asked Dick, catching sight of a newspaper lying on the sofa. "I should like to look at it a moment if you don't object. There's something in it about the Hillbury eleven." As he took it up his eye fell upon a red and white bundle that lay concealed beneath.

"What's all this?" he asked in astonishment, taking up the bundle, out of which dropped what seemed to be a red flannel skirt.

Martin said nothing, and Melvin added, flushing: "Oh, excuse me, Martin; I didn't mean to be intrusive. Let me glance at the paper, and I'll be off."

"Oh, I don't mind telling you," replied Martin, calmly. "It's nothing. I was just overhauling some clothes I once wore in a Fourth of July procession."

Dick glanced through the paper and started to go.

"You'd better not say anything about seeing that bundle here."

"Why not?" asked Dick, with a laugh; "you didn't steal it, did you?"

"Oh, no, it's mine, fast enough; only if it was known I had it, some one might want to borrow it."

"It's not likely," replied Melvin.

"At all events, you won't speak of it without first consulting me, will you?"

"Why, of course not, if you don't want me to."

The next morning the whole town was gazing skyward. The statue of Justice which crowned the dome of the town hall had been arrayed in garments of red and white. The red flannel petticoat projected behind as though supported by a bustle. In the scales which the goddess held lay what from the ground looked like a rag baby; its long white skirt, floating like a pennant in the wind, was inscribed in great black figures with the date that represented the preparatory class.

The whole school was thrilled with admiration for the unknown hero of the deed, and for the next few days the boys talked of little else. To climb without a ladder to the roof of the building would be in summer a fairly difficult feat; to dress the goddess at the very top of the dome, in the middle of January, seemed the acme of daring ingenuity.

There were various conjectures as to both the means and the man, and the knowing ones, pointing to the fact that ladders could not well be used on the roof, declared that the ascent had been by the lightning-rod. Dick was not surprised to hear Martin mentioned among those suspected, though the general verdict was that he was too heavy for such work. The townspeople, who were used to students' pranks, were inclined rather to laugh than to be indignant. Not so the officials in charge of town affairs, whose magisterial dignity was sorely wounded by the attempt to protect the weather-beaten figure from the violence of the winter storms. There soon appeared a poster announcing a reward of ten dollars for "information which would lead to the discovery of the perpetrators of the outrage"; but it appeared that no one had such information to give.

A few clear days passed, followed by storm and cold and wind; but the flannel garments and the rag baby clung to the wooden figure. The skirt stiffened with ice and was torn into longitudinal strips, which flapped ungracefully over the protruding bustle. The baby's dress became a mass of rags. Yet, through snow and sleet, gale and calm, the rags and bustle remained securely fastened, a monument to the thoroughness of the costumer's work.

Another thaw came, and the snow disappeared from the roof. The selectman and one of the village policemen were standing one morning discussing the situation, and considering what further action they could take to discover the offenders, when Martin, who had been in school from his "Prep" year and knew all the prominent town officials, approached them.

"The old lady still clings to her rags, Mr. Peters," said he, addressing the selectman. "I suppose she doesn't want to part with 'em these cold days."

"Yes," growled the dignitary; "we'll have to get some of you fellows to go up and take 'em down, you're so confounded spry about gittin' 'em up."

"A rather difficult thing to do," said Martin, measuring the height with a critical eye. "A fall from the top of that dome wouldn't be comfortable."

"We've offered ten dollars to any one that'll take 'em down, but we ain't found nobody yet that wants to risk it. The painters say they'll have to have a stagin'."

"Ten dollars!" said Martin. "I'd like to try it well enough myself for ten dollars. But my father wouldn't like me to take such a risk. You see I'm an only child."

"One's enough of you, I reckon," said the policeman.

"Think so?" responded Martin. "I wonder how high that dome is. Do you really think the boys put those things up there?"

"Think it? we know it!"

"You don't say so?" returned the student. "Strange, isn't it, that what some boy carried up there alone in a dark night the whole town of Seaton cannot take down in two weeks!" — and Martin, with this parting shot, pursued his way, followed by the maledictions of the officials.

CHAPTER VII

A CAT'S-PAW

Dick and Philip were studying together when Martin appeared.

"Well, urchin, how are you?" he began; "your doll up there in the goddess's scales is fast getting ragged."

Philip looked at Dick appealingly, as if for permission to use his fists upon the insulter. But Martin did not give him a chance to reply.

"How long before you'll be free, Melvin?" he asked.

"Now, if you want me; Philip can just as well study by himself."

"Then come down to my room."

"Do you want to make ten dollars in about ten minutes?" asked Martin, when the door was shut.

"In what way?"

"I've just been talking with old Peters, that clod of a selectman, and he says he'll give ten dollars to any one who will undress the goddess."

Dick thought a moment. "It's too great a risk."

"Risk! there is no risk at all; you are thirty pounds lighter than I, and can climb twice as easily."

"But I don't know how."

"Go up by the lightning-rod, silly; it's strong and secure. Get Peters to put you upon the roof with a ladder, then shin right up the rod. You can take a little stick along with you to rest your feet on occasionally; then it won't be such hard work."

"But my hands!" said Melvin.

"You'll have to wear thick gloves or you'll get the skin off. I'll furnish gloves."

"Ten dollars!" thought Dick; "and so easy to earn!" He had often climbed as high, merely for the joy of climbing.

"I'll do it."

"Come, then, get on your jersey and foot-ball trousers," urged Martin, "and get out on the square as soon as you can. I'll go and notify Peters that you're coming. To go up there with gloves and a ladder in the daylight is child's play."

Mr. Peters looked sharply at Dick when Martin presented him as a candidate for the reward, but there was nothing in the lad's face to confirm the selectman's suspicions. He readily agreed to furnish the ladder.

The boy started. From the roof to the edge of the dome was a long stretch of rod with few supports. This was the hardest portion of the ascent. Fortunately Dick was used to heights, and his gymnasium practice had given him training in rope climbing. Up he went, hand over hand, carefully and surely to the edge of the flooring of the dome, where he rested a minute, lying on his stomach in the gutter; then crawled slowly over the rounded surface to the pinnacle. Once on top, it was the work of a moment to cut the cords and throw down the rags. The descent was easy; he had merely to slide down the rod to the roof, and thence clamber at his leisure to the ground.

To Dick's surprise, though he had been only a few minutes aloft, a considerable crowd had gathered during his absence; for the inhabitants of Seaton are never so pressed with business as not to have time for any passing spectacle. There was a general applause, and the bystanders looked curiously at Dick as if he were an acrobat performing in the square. The tattered garments had been collected, and the selectman had them under his arm as he handed Dick the ten dollars. "You did that very well," he said; "looked as if you had been there before."

"Well, I hadn't," answered Melvin, "but I'll do it again for the same price. Don't you want to let me have the rags?"

"Not much," replied Peters, decidedly. "I ain't goin' to have 'em up there again.

And look here, young fellow, you tell the boy who did this thing, he'd better not try it again. He won't get off so easy another time."

"All right," said Dick; "if I ever see him, I'll tell him."

Melvin had gained ten dollars by this escapade, and he felt grateful to Martin for the opportunity; but there were other results that he had not foreseen. It was now considered settled in school that he had been the original climber. So clever a trick did it seem to put the things up there, and then persuade Peters to pay him to bring them down, that the average boy accepted the theory immediately, and gave him full credit for the performance. Against the tide of public opinion Dick's protests counted for naught; and Martin, the only fellow in school who could have relieved him from his false position, seemed rather to try to deepen the impression that Melvin was responsible for the whole affair.

A few mornings later Curtis dropped in for a call.

"You haven't forgotten about the football, have you?" he said. "It's time we were increasing the team. I've been talking with Todd. He'll probably be here next fall, he's braced up so this year. Don't you think we could admit him as a third? He can't play wonderfully, but he's got lots of sand; and if we can only get him interested, he will work like a Trojan. We want about six fellows this year in the crowd, every man full of fight and play — no men of the Martin kind who are up and down, awake and asleep, according to the weather."

"Martin won't be here, anyway," put in Dick; "he's a senior."

"You can't tell anything about it, he may be fired any time; he's always up to some deviltry or other. If he goes now, he's just as likely to come back next year as not."

"I'd take Toddy if I were you," said

Dick. And so the team was increased to three. They met once a week and talked of plans, and worked away indoors on what they thought would help them.

The excitement of the town-hall episode soon died away, leaving Dick to the steady grind of the winter term, made additionally burdensome by the care of Philip's studies. But he did not wince or complain; he was bound to show Old Grim this term that he was no shirk. He took no part in the dances and amusements which the society fellows enjoyed; the fortnightly meetings of a literary club alone broke the monotony of his studious evenings. One hour a day he spent in the gymnasium, which was full of students practising for the prizes of the approaching winter tournament; but warned by the experience of the fall, Dick shunned the competitive sports.

Such unnatural self-restraint wore upon his spirit. So one dull February day when Martin said, "Come down to my room this evening, Dick; there'll be some fellows in, and we'll have something to eat," he joyfully accepted the invitation.

In Martin's room were gathered perhaps a dozen boys, laughing, bantering, eating crackers and cheese and sardines, and drinking ginger-ale. They talked of school affairs, cracked jokes, told stories, discussed the teachers, sang songs. The older boys revived old stories of the past, and handed on to the younger ones what had been similarly passed on to them.

The newcomers listened with rapt admiration to these tales of the age of heroes. Upon Martin, in particular, seemed to have fallen the mantle of the old-time seers; while as to events within the range of his own school lifetime, his memory served him equally well.

The evening passed like a song. Before Dick was aware of it, it was half-past nine and most of the boys were hustling home.

Argent, Simmons, Thayer, Todd, with Dick and Martin, still remained. Martin, after locking the door, went to a trunk and took out two or three bottles marked "beer."

"You're the kind, Martin," nodded Argent; "you ain't afraid of Grim's notions."

"What is it?" asked Thayer.

"Nothing but beer; have a glass?"

"I don't object to the beer, but I hate to take it in this sneaking way."

"Nothing sneaking about it," answered Martin, promptly. "Grim or any one else has no right to dictate to us what we shall eat or drink. Have some, Dick?"

"Afraid?" sneered Argent; "or didn't you ever see any before?"

"Neither," answered Melvin, with flushed face. "I don't drink things of that sort, and I wouldn't here, anyway. As long as I receive the privileges of the school, I shall not intentionally break its rules."

"Huh!" said Argent, contemptuously.

"Well, drink the ginger, then," said Martin; "there's more on the table near you. Gentlemen, I propose the health of the man who climbed to the top of the town hall."

All drank in silence.

"And I'll wager my chance of getting into college without conditions, against Argent's chances of ever getting in at all, that Melvin could tell us who put the things up there."

"Yes, yes, Melvin; tell us, tell us," was the cry.

"Well," said Dick, perplexed, "Martin did it."

"Bluff!" said Simmons, "you did it yourself."

"I didn't," retorted Melvin.

"Oh, well, if he won't acknowledge it, he won't, that's all," said Martin; "we don't want to quarrel over it. Now will some one tell me what day of the month it is?"

"Thirteenth."

"And to-morrow?"

"The fourteenth, probably."

"Of course, but what day is the fourteenth of February?"

"Valentine's day," said Melvin.

"Right you are, old boy! Now, gentlemen, considering the fact that this institution owes some recognition to this particular saint, and that it refuses to honor him with a holiday, I, or rather some of my friends, have prepared a valentine."

He went to the trunk again, and brought back a roll of paper, which he opened sufficiently to display in great, black, press-printed letters:—

COMING! COMING!!

The Multifarious Mendacious Menagerie!!!

"Oh, come, let's see it!"

"Not much!"

"Why not?"

"Can't do it. I promised not to show it; it would spoil everything."

"What's in it, anyway?"

"Simply some grinds on the fellows. I want one of you to post it on the hall bulletin-board to-night as you go home.

I'll give you a key to the building which I happen to have. All there is to do is to go in, paste it up, and then laugh with the rest in the morning — who'll do it?"

Nobody volunteered.

"I'd do it myself if I weren't on probation, but I can't go out after seven. I'd hate to have it fall through. Suppose you fellows draw lots to see who'll do it."

"I'm willing to do anything to help you out," said Thayer, who seemed to think they were under some obligation for hospitality, "if there's no harm in the thing."

"How shall the lots be drawn?" asked Martin, without paying any attention to Thayer's condition.

"Let's guess dates," said Argent, nodding to his boon companion, Simmons. "Martin takes a coin, tells us what it is, we all guess the date of it, and the fellow who is farthest astray puts up the Valentine."

"That's fair," said Martin, pulling a coin from his pocket and looking at it. "It's a cent, one of the thin kind, not an old one with an eagle on it. Who makes the first guess?"

"Take it right in order from you—Melvin first, then Thayer, then the rest of us," replied Argent.

"All right; Melvin begin —"

The whole thing had come up so suddenly and developed so rapidly that Dick did not at first know what to think. Of Martin he was naturally and rightfully suspicious, but he was Martin's guest, and had already declined the beer and apparently refused to make an honest confession about the town-hall episode; he did not want to appear churlish and hateful. If Thayer had accepted the arrangement, why shouldn't he, and make the best of it?

"Hurry up, Melvin, it's getting late," warned Martin.

"1895," said Dick.

Then Thayer guessed 1885, Todd 1891, Simmons 1893, Argent 1887.

"You're in for it, Dick — 1889," — and Martin showed the coin.

"He, he!" snickered Argent. "We had a sure thing. All we had to do was to guess between you and Thayer, and we couldn't be farthest away."

Dick became red with indignation. "Then it wasn't a fair deal!"

"He's going to crawl!" said Argent.

"Well, what do you want done?" said Dick, turning to Martin.

"Just take this sheet with a brush and pot of paste, which I have ready. Go to the Academy, and paste the thing on the bulletin-board. You must not light matches or some one may see you."

"How shall I see, then?"

"You don't need to see. You know where to go, and the paper is rolled up with the printing inside. You must promise not to look at it on the way."

"I won't do it!" exclaimed Dick; "it's mean business."

"Oh, indeed, if you are going to crawl,

we'll have to get some one else. You ought to have said you didn't dare do it before the lot fell on you."

Argent and Simmons exchanged contemptuous glances.

"I'll go," said Dick, furious at the sight; "but how shall I get in again if I go out now? It's almost ten and the house will soon be locked."

"I'll let you in," replied Martin.

The party broke up hastily. Dick took the pot of paste and the brush, and set off.

The Academy door opened easily to the key. Spreading the poster on the floor, the boy brushed on the paste, then finding a space on the board fairly free from notices, he carefully fastened the sheet, rubbing it smooth with his hand. He felt no fear; he was too angry for that—angry with himself that he had allowed himself to be tricked into such a performance, angry with Martin and Argent for the part they had played in it. The more he considered the matter, the more convinced he became that there was some mean scheme on foot, of which he was to be made to assume the responsibility.

He strode furiously homeward, swinging the brush in one hand and the paste cup in the other, thinking of no one and avoiding no one. At a street crossing, close under a gas-light, a familiar voice accosted him:—

"You are getting home a little late to-night, Melvin."

"Yes, sir," answered Dick, with a start, taking his paste-pot and brush in one hand, while he touched his cap with the other. "I'm not often out in the evening."

"You have used your time well this term," continued Professor Anthony. "I'm glad to see you doing yourself justice."

"I've been working pretty steadily, sir. It encourages me that you think I've been doing better."

"Now the only question seems to be, whether you can keep it up," went on the teacher. "Hard work is like bicycle-riding uphill: anybody can do it for a while, but only a well-trained man can keep it up any length of time."

"That's true," said Dick, "and I'm now hoping for the training." A few more pleasant words brought them to Mrs. Hayward's gate, and Dick said good night and entered with a light heart. As Professor Anthony's footsteps died away in the distance, a low whistle under Martin's window brought that inventive youth to the door.

"Go softly," he whispered; "the old lady has ears like a cat."

CHAPTER VIII

INTO THE FIRE AND OUT

THE next morning Dick opened his sleepy eyes with that vague consciousness of having done something wrong that frequently precedes the more definite reminder of awakened memory. As the events of the past night came back to him, he could but feel that the probabilities were strongly against the innocence of the valentine. The more he considered, the surer he became that he had been weak in yielding and wholly wrong in not demanding to know the character of the poster he had assisted in publishing. After chapel, avoiding the crowd which clustered about the bulletin-board, he hurried directly home.

An hour later Philip burst into the room, forgetting in his excitement to knock or excuse himself.

"Who do you suppose put that vile thing on the board, Dick? I think it's right low."

"I haven't seen it," answered Dick, "or rather," — correcting himself with a blush — "I don't know what's in it. I didn't have any recitation this morning, so came right home after chapel. What is it?"

"Why, it's an awfully mean thing. It calls the Faculty names, makes them all animals, — hog and giraffe and weasel and all that, — and what it says of some of the fellows is perfectly terrible. I'll bet Martin had a hand in it; it seems just like him."

"Does it say anything about us, Philip?"

"It says, 'Lightning-rod Dick will perform in mid-air for the gaping thousands, accompanied by his trained monkey, Simiola Pooliana, recently caught in the forests of Virginia.'" Philip recited this with a glibness which showed a careful study of the poster.

"That isn't very bad," said Melvin, smiling. "We can both stand that, I think.

What do the other boys think about it?"

"They say it's right low"—Philip's stock of adjectives was not large; "that is, most of them; some seem to think it's very funny. I say it was a mighty mean man who put it up there."

"Who wrote it, you mean," said Dick.

"Wrote it or put it up, it's all the same," insisted Philip, "because no one would put it up who didn't approve of it. No decent fellow would have anything to do with such a thing; do you think he would, Dick?"

"I'm sure I don't know, Philip," replied Melvin, hurriedly taking his book again, and bending down over it to hide his flushed face.

In a few minutes he threw down the book again, snatched up his hat, and hurried over to the Academy to see for himself the nature of the thing. The poster had already been torn off, but copies were in circulation, and Dick had no difficulty in learning the nature of his publication. Grimalkin, the argus-eyed panther, leaping down upon the unwary nocturnal traveller, was unmistakably Mr. Graham. Professor Anthony was represented as a raging lion revelling among a cageful of frightened, defenceless victims. These were mild and harmless thrusts; after them came sneers and flings at other teachers and schoolmates that were not merely disrespectful but false and insulting.

"Good, ain't it?" said the owner of the copy, with a grin, as Dick handed it back.

"Good! no, bad — cowardly, and contemptible," blurted Dick, furious to think that he had been made a cat's-paw for a shameless attack like this.

His companion laughed aloud. "Those who are in it of course don't appreciate it; but you oughtn't to be sore about a little thing like that. I call it mighty bright."

Bright! The highest non-athletic distinction a schoolboy can attain is to be called bright! Wit and good fellowship together cover a host of obvious sins. Do you know why so many clever boys go astray before they can bring their much-worshipped cleverness to bear on the problems of the world? They are spoiled young by the admiration of their schoolmates.

All that day Dick carried an ever growing burden of remorse and fear. It was certain that "Tony," when he overtook him the night before, had noticed what was in his hand. He would surely be questioned as to his whereabouts, and he could not save himself from conviction except by open lying. As far as he himself was concerned, he would not have hesitated a moment as to his duty. He had posted the valentine and should honestly acknowledge it. But he was not alone. To tell the honest truth and the whole truth it would be necessary to go into the circumstances of the case, and this he could not do without betraying the author. It was true that the author was both false as a friend and personally deserving of punishment for his contemptible production. Equally evident was it that

Martin was quite willing that some one else should bear the punishment for his fault. Yet schoolboy honor demanded that there should be no "squealing," and this code no self-respecting boy would infringe.

By the middle of the afternoon the problem had resolved itself into the simple question whether it was wisest to go at once to Grim and trust him with what could be told of the story, or wait for the official summons. At least half a dozen times he went to Martin's room to consult him, but all to no purpose. Martin was not to be found. At the supper table the valentine was again discussed. The latest anecdotes were as to the effect this public ridicule had had on the subjects of some of the "gags." One little fellow had burst into tears in his morning recitation; an older boy, who had been savagely "roughed" in the effusion, was already packing his trunk to leave school. With the heartlessness natural to boys, the amused hearers laughed and speculated over the tale; its cruelty and pathos impressed them but little. Dick listened with silent indignation, knowing well that any expression of condemnation on his part would be regarded as personal rancor. The struggle in his mind was nearing a conclusion.

A half-hour later, as Mr. Graham sat musing before his library fire, Melvin was announced.

"Good evening, Melvin."

"Good evening, sir."

The boy stood with flushed cheeks, his eyes fixed on the ground, a moment silent; then he stammered out, "I've come to say that it was I that put up the valentine —"

"Melvin!"

It was a single word, yet in it were condensed surprise, disappointment, and abhorrence that sentences would not have expressed. Dick stood in silent confusion.

"Melvin," Mr. Graham went on, with a slight tremor in his voice, "I am grievously disappointed. When you came here, you brought me a letter from one of the noblest men we ever had in school. You are a lad of good parts, and we have had every reason to suppose that you were trying to do credit to Mr. Carleton, the school, and yourself. And now it seems that you have stooped to befoul yourself and humiliate us by this cowardly, scurrilous, insulting attack. As for myself, I have been here too long to feel personally injured by the sneers of a few low fellows who have in some way crept in among us. Others, however, are not as thick-skinned as I am, and may justly feel distressed at such a wantonly cruel, false publication."

The Principal paused to give the culprit a chance to reply; but Dick, who wholly agreed with what had been said, saw no reason to speak.

"Have you had any reason to complain of your treatment, either by teachers or classmates, while you have been in school?"

"No, sir."

"Then your abuse of these men was entirely gratuitous?"

"I didn't abuse them," faltered Dick. "I didn't write the thing, I merely put it up."

"Didn't you know what it was?"

"No, sir; I had not read it. I supposed it was something different, and I promised not to look at it."

"Then you had nothing to do with it except to post it?"

"That's all, sir."

"Do you mean to say you undertook to post a placard like this without looking at it, or having any idea as to what it was?"

"I was told it was a valentine, but a perfectly innocent one," cried Dick, "and I was trapped into putting it up by a trick. More than that I ought not to tell."

Mr. Graham rose and went to the window, where he stood for some moments intently gazing out into the darkness. The culprit stood waiting in an agony of suspense. A word would have cleared him, but that word Dick would not speak. Finally Mr. Graham turned, walked over to the lad, and held out his hand.

"Well, Melvin, I believe you. To another your story might seem questionable, but I think I now understand both your story and you. I do not ask who are the guilty ones in this matter, but I do wish to give you a serious warning against them. The boy who would trick you into a disgraceful action like this, and leave you to take his punishment, does not deserve your charity. Take my advice, and for the future avoid him. He may be popular and influential, he may be even in a fashion fond of you, but he cannot be worthy of your friendship. That is sufficient."

And Dick, overwhelmed at the turn affairs had taken, could only mumble thanks and bow himself out. A great load had been taken from his mind.

CHAPTER IX

THE ANNOYING VISITOR

Mr. Graham's advice, with regard to Martin, Dick tried to follow, notwithstanding the voluble protestations of sorrow and repentance which the offender poured forth. He hadn't meant any harm by the valentine. It wasn't very hard on the teachers, either; they all roughed the boys in the recitation room, and this was only getting even with them. With such a good-natured, indolent fellow it was impossible to quarrel. For a time Dick ceased to visit Martin's room, but Martin came more often to his, lounging in with a box of candy, or coming for help on some question which he did not care to take the trouble to look up himself. Dick never knew whether to laugh at or scold him; Philip continued to view him with suspicion.

One afternoon Philip was in Dick's room engaged in writing a composition. It was nearly four o'clock; since half-past two he had been laboring ineffectually at the disagreeable task. He was not a dull boy, nor could he be called a lazy one, but his antipathy to exerting himself on such a loathsome exercise always forced him to waste an hour or two unnecessarily beating about the bush.

To-day his progress seemed unusually slow. Dick had insisted that the composition be written that afternoon. The boy sat by the window, pencil in hand, now drumming with it on the desk, now viciously chewing the splintered end, now gloomily watching the passers-by.

"There goes Franklin with a base-ball bat. He's going to the Gym, I reckon; I wish I were with him."

Dick made no answer. A small dog appeared sidling along the street with a pert air of independence, stopping to exchange greetings with a larger companion, who came into view from the opposite direction.

"Dogs have a good time in life. I wonder who owns that little one. I wish I had Sport up here. You ought to see him, Dick; he's the best dog in the city."

Then a pause for a few minutes. Phil read over what he had last written, and scratched it out as unsatisfactory. Inspiration, however, still withheld her favor, and he soon returned to the attractions of the street.

"There goes a fellow in your class with his skates. I wonder if the ice is good," — and then he burst indignantly forth: "Oh, hang these compositions, anyway! They make me tired. I'm not going to try any more." On the strength of this determination he went to work again, and, by dint of scratching and erasing, he succeeded in adding two sentences to the document. After this effort he must needs refresh himself by batting a tennis-ball against the wall.

"You mustn't do that, Philip. Mrs. Hayward doesn't want her house tumbling down about her head. Why don't you finish the thing, and get rid of it?"

"Oh, I never can do anything," answered the discouraged lad. "Besides, when I get it written, it'll come back all marked up with red lines. It isn't worth doing."

"It's worth trying, anyway, if only to get fewer red lines than you got in your last," returned Dick, in the paternal tone to which he was unconsciously becoming accustomed.

The thought was a new one to Phil, who turned to his papers with a fierce determination, which promised great achievement. The achievement, however, was destined not to come to pass, for soon a thump was heard outside, and, immediately after, Martin's face peered in through the half-opened door.

"Whew! how hard we do work!" exclaimed the newcomer. "Even the infants are taught to hold pens in their chubby little fists. What is it, sonny, a poem or a letter?"

Philip scowled. "It is a composition."

"Read it," said Martin, settling himself in a chair for a critical hearing.

"I will not," replied the boy, very positively.

"Oh, come, you needn't be afraid. I shan't make fun of it."

"You won't get a chance," returned Philip, "for I'm not going to read it. I'm too busy to stop." And he turned his back resolutely on the intruder.

Martin now turned to Melvin. "What were you and Curtis trying to do with a foot-ball in the Gymnasium? Getting ready for the next season?"

"Perhaps so," replied Melvin, guardedly.

"I suppose you fellows think you are going to win the game next year?"

"We shall try to."

"You'll have to make an early start to do it, let me tell you. The Hillbury team will be mostly veterans next year, for they're all coming back, and here there won't be any one to speak of. You can't do anything by winter practice, anyway."

"I didn't say we could," retorted Dick, nettled by Martin's contempt for the football material his departure would leave in school; "but we're going to win just the same."

"I'll bet five dollars that you won't, and I'll come up from Cambridge to see the game," Martin declared.

"I don't bet," replied Dick, shortly, "but wait and see."

"Well, I'd like to bet some one you wouldn't; then if you lose, I should have something to console me. — Philip!"

"What?"

"Do you expect to pass the trustees' examination?"

"What's that?"

"Why, don't you know? Really, Dick

ought to keep you better informed. At the end of every term the trustees and a lot of old ministers and lawyers and school-teachers, with a professor or two from some college, if they can get him, all come into recitations to inspect and ask questions. Don't they, Dick?"

Dick assented.

"And they're hardest on the Preps. It's what they call the 'culling-out time.'"

Philip looked dismayed, but curious to learn the whole extent of the impending danger; so Martin, assured of the lad's interest, ran glibly on. "It wouldn't be so bad if they asked you fair questions, but they don't. You know Peters in my class? He was almost downed by a fat, old, bald-headed man who wanted him to give the multiplication table diagonally. Pete couldn't do it at all, but the old chap was good-hearted, and let him off with the sevens and eights said alternately backward."

"I don't understand that," said Philip.

"No more did we, but it didn't matter.

I shall always remember the question that came to me: If four horses and a colt eat two tons of hay in six weeks, supposing the colt to eat half as much as a horse, and that two horses can plough an acre and a half a day, how many pounds and ounces of hay will it take to plough a field seven rods wide and eleven dekameters long?"

The solemnity of Martin's face as he rapidly recited the problem deepened Philip's consternation.

"It isn't true, is it, Dick?"

"He doesn't know anything about it," Martin made haste to interpose. "He's only been here this year."

"Why, no one of the boys could answer that."

"Oh, yes," said Martin, reassuringly; "it's not so very hard. I got the right answer,—thirty-six pounds, four and one-half ounces. You don't need to worry about it, however, for if you should fail here, you could probably make it up in some other subject. Now in Latin they ask easier questions. Perhaps you are good in Latin."

"Not very," replied Philip, shaking his head dubiously. "What do they ask?"

"One of them opens a grammar and says, 'Section 317.' Then you give, word for word, A, B, and C, 1, 2, and 3, Notes 1 and 2, and the Remark, with at least one example under each."

Philip was thoroughly frightened. Martin's face was as inexpressive as ever, but Dick, despite his efforts, could not restrain a smile. The boy saw it and recovered his courage.

"I don't believe you at all!" he cried, his anger increasing rapidly, now that he suspected Martin was at his old tricks again.

"But these aren't an instance to what they asked last year. Only two Preps answered it correctly."

For a moment Philip wavered between suspicion and curiosity. He did want to turn his back on the big, imperturbable tease, and treat him with silent contempt, but the bait was too alluring. He put his first question cautiously: —

"What was it in?"

"Arithmetic," replied the senior, — "the hard ones are always in arithmetic; but let's talk of something else that you are more interested in."

"I'm interested in this; tell me, what was it?"

"A Union fort, with four equal sides, contained three acres. How near together were the defenders placed on the wall to hold it against a Confederate army of twenty thousand men, allowing twenty per cent for the rebels who ran away, and reckoning one Yankee equal to three rebs?"

It took the lad a few seconds to comprehend the full scope of the insult — then his blood was stirred, and stirred violently. He leaped to his feet, grabbed the object nearest him, which proved to be a Latin grammar, and launched it at the offender's head.

"It's all a lie," he cried hotly, "and you don't know anything about examinations or Southerners or anything else. If I were your size, I'd soon show you what a Southerner is, as you've shown me how mean a Northerner can be."

Martin had dodged the book, and was now picking it up and smoothing out the leaves.

"What a nasty temper! I hope this isn't the Southern way of using books. I really didn't know the people of your state had such a contempt for learning."

Martin stood near the door, ready to slip out if the book-throwing was renewed, but Philip, who had apparently given up fight, turned, without another word, to the window, and, resting his forehead against the cool glass, gazed out into the dimly lighted street. In the lad's eye, as he wheeled about, was a treacherous glisten that caught Martin's attention. In a moment he was at Philip's side, with his hand on the little fellow's shoulder.

"I've been unkind, Phil," he said with a gentleness that had never before appeared in his tone; "I didn't mean to offend you. Forgive me, won't you, and I'll promise not to do it again."

"No, I won't," growled the boy, shaking off the grasp on his shoulder, and trying hard to suppress the sobs. "You wouldn't keep your promise if you made it."

"Well, good night, then. You'll feel better in the morning. It's the composition that's made all the trouble. And as for the examinations —"

"Don't begin on that subject again," interrupted Dick, whose patience was failing. "We've had all we can stand of it, to-night. Haven't you anything to do?"

"Not much," replied Martin. "I believe in sight-reading myself."

"Well, go and do it, then. Can't you see we want to work?"

CHAPTER X

THE ORDEAL

For some time longer the copying engrossed Philip's attention; but when the composition was finished, and work was begun on the lessons for the next day, his thoughts kept recurring to his recent grievances. That this consideration was not likely to result in profit, his manner soon made apparent. His face grew flushed, and he kept muttering under his breath in a way by no means studious. Dick cast about for some means of diverting the youngster's thoughts from the disagreeable subject.

"Philip, do you know where Argent's room is?"

"No."

"Well, it's the third house above Professor Anthony's on the right. I wish you would go round and get a book of mine that is there. Martin left it, and I don't want to wait for him to bring it back or to go for it myself. You won't need to stop at all, and the walk will do you good."

So Philip, informed as to the book, set off in no cheerful frame of mind, brooding on his wrongs as he went.

In answer to his ring a woman appeared. "Does Argent room here?" asked Philip.

"Mr. Argent? Yes, on the next floor; his study is the front room on the left. Go right up."

Philip found the door, knocked, and, after a short delay, was admitted into a gaudily furnished room. In the middle, at a large desk, Simmons was seated, opposite him was a chair which Argent had apparently vacated to open the door; across the room, with his chair tilted against the wall, sat Martin. There was a peculiar odor in the air, and Argent's yellow face seemed unusually flushed.

"I've come for Melvin's book," began Philip; "he said Martin left it here."

"It's up there on the shelf," answered Argent, nodding toward a corner. "Find it yourself."

Philip looked among the books for the one he was sent for. Simmons leaned across the table and whispered to Argent. Martin still sat against the wall.

"This is it, I think," said Philip, bringing the book to the light and examining the fly leaf; "yes, 'Richard Melvin,'" and closing the book he turned to the door.

"Oh, hold on!" exclaimed Argent, rising and blocking his way. "We want to show you something." Simmons pulled a double drawer from the desk and placed it on the top, displaying in it several bottles and some glasses, which fitted neatly into their positions. Two of the bottles were marked "Extra Dry," the others were beer bottles.

"Do you know what's in these?" said Argent, pompously.

"No," said Philip.

"Well, it's champagne! Do you know what they used to do to Preps?"

"No, and I don't care," the lad boldly answered.

"Well, they used to haze 'em," continued Argent; "toss 'em in blankets and duck 'em in the river; but they don't do so any more, they do something better."

"Yes, treat them to champagne," put in Simmons, holding out to the lad a glass full of the effervescing, yellow liquid. "You needn't be afraid of it," he added, as Philip made no motion to accept the offered draught; "it's good."

"I don't want any."

"That makes no difference, you've got to take it."

Philip hesitated a moment as he considered his position. It was plain, even to his inexperienced eye, that Simmons and Argent were somewhat under the influence of the liquor they had been drinking, and he believed them both quite capable of trying to force him to take the champagne. Martin still remained a silent spectator of the proceedings, but was to all appearance a likely abettor. Philip was by no means the faultless boy of the story-books; but he had promised his mother when he came to school never to touch any liquor, and to-night he was in no mood to be bullied. A glance at his old enemy sitting against the wall made his resolution a defiance. He would show Martin that Southerners were no cowards.

"I won't touch it," he cried, making a dash for the door.

"I guess not," said Argent, pushing him back and locking the door. "Now, youngster, you've got to do two things: first, drink what's in that glass; second, promise not to tell a living soul about it."

The lad made no response.

"You'd better make up your mind to it in the beginning," continued Argent, "or we're likely to hurt you." As he said this, he opened another drawer and took out a handsome silver-mounted revolver, which he laid on the desk.

"Will you do it?"

"No, and I'll yell just as loud as I can the moment you touch me."

"You're a little, sneaking coward," replied Argent.

The chief conspirators now conferred apart. It was decided to tie and gag the boy; then give him five minutes to change his mind; if he would not drink then, to hold his nose, and pour the liquor down his throat. Martin rose, and came over to where the two were standing, slipping the revolver into his pocket as he passed the desk. "You hold him," proposed Simmons, as Martin joined them, "and we'll tie and gag him."

"I can't stay any longer, or I might help you," he said, "but I've been on probation till lately, and must keep out of such little affairs. Let me take the key to the door, Argent. You've locked us in," and before they realized it he had unlocked the door and was gone.

The few fellows whom Martin met on his way home were much astonished to see him running at a frantic pace. They halloed after him as he rushed along, but he made no reply. Bursting into Dick's room, he threw himself exhausted into a chair.

"What in the world is the matter?" cried Dick, in amazement.

"Here's the key!" gasped the exhausted messenger, holding out Argent's door key, which he had brought with him in his flight; "go right over — they're trying to make Phil drink champagne."

"Who?"

"Argent and Simmons — in Argent's room."

"The scoundrels! Why didn't you stop it?"

"I couldn't have done anything, anyway. They've been drinking, and I'd only get myself into a scrape. I'm just off probation, and can't afford to take any risks — you'd better hurry; it's the front room on the second floor." Dick did not wait for further urging. Bareheaded and in his slippers, with no thought but of reaching Phil at the earliest moment, and of inflicting summary punishment upon his tormentors, he flew along the clear sidewalk with all the speed possible to sound lungs and muscles hardened by athletic exercise.

With Philip in the meantime matters had gone hard. Not finding the key after Martin's departure, the inquisitors put a chair against the door and returned to their victim. While Argent offered the glass, Simmons seized the lad from behind, put his hand over his mouth, and threw him on the floor; then they gagged him with a handkerchief and tied his hands behind his back. The five minutes' grace elapsed; still Philip, though despairing of help, obstinately shook his head. Persuasion and threats effected nothing.

"Let's let the little brat go," said Simmons, who was not finding the fun very enjoyable.

"I guess not," replied Argent; "he's not going to beat us in that style. You hold his nose, so he'll have to swallow, and I'll pour the stuff down his throat."

This they tried; and Philip, frantically struggling, kicking with his feet, wriggling his body, tossing his head from side to side until his lips were bleeding profusely, felt that he must soon give in. Argent and Simmons grew more angry and violent every moment. Phil made a final effort to cry out, but could only utter a long, nasal moan.

"Hold still, will you, you little brat," shouted Argent, "or we'll kill you!"

Suddenly the door flew open, and Dick plunged in over the broken chair.

"You fiends!" he cried, leaping upon them before they were quite on their feet. With one swinging blow he caught Argent over the eye and sent him like a dead weight to the floor; then turning to Simmons, who, being something of a sparrer, had taken a defensive attitude, Dick made a feint at his face, and, as he threw up his hands, grasped him close about the waist with both arms. Our hero's hands met behind his opponent's body, and under that grip, which, when well taken, no boy in Seaton could withstand, Simmons collapsed like a bundle of rags and sank backward upon the floor.

"I'd like to hit you just once, you coward," said Dick, panting with his exertions; "and if you stir while I'm in the room, I'll do it whether you are down or not!" But Simmons did not try to rise. "Come, Phil, let's get out of this if you're not hurt."

On the stairs they met the woman of the house, who had at length been aroused by the tumult, and now wanted to know what the noise was.

"There has been a fight, that's all," was the reply. "You'd better go up and take care of the wounded."

The next day Argent did not appear at his recitations. Before noon, in some inexplicable way, — for Dick and Phil, you may be sure, said never a word about it, — the story leaked out, and every boy in school was venting his opinion as to the occurrence. Little Phil was the hero of every version of the tale. For a whole day his glory lasted, his sturdy resistance and "sand" meeting with the general commendation they deserved. Dick, too, came in for his share of approval. As for Argent and Simmons there could be no question — they would surely be "fired."

A few days later Mrs. Argent arrived in town, coming, as she assured one of the boys, "to set matters right with the Principal." She had an interview with Mr. Graham, of which, as there were no spectators, we cannot give an account; but it is certain that she retired from it very warm and angry, to pack up her son's belongings. Various quotations from the distinguished lady passed from mouth to mouth, handed on with a laugh and a joking word, while the lads with vivid imaginations pretended to definite knowledge as to the method used by Mrs. Argent in trying to secure a reversal of the sentence against her son. Whatever the methods, they were wholly unsuccessful; for Argent, after furnishing this interesting episode to the daily school history, disappeared like many another from the school horizon, leaving neither name nor trace.

Dick and Martin were never called upon to account for their conduct in the affair. Indeed, within a week, the event was apparently forgotten. The boys scattered for the Easter recess, and returned to all the charm of the breaking spring with no thought or remembrance of the long winter now safely passed.

The unassigned scholarship was awarded to Melvin. Mr. Graham had invited him to tea the first evening of the recess, and, though the boy looked forward to the ordeal with some apprehension, he soon found himself at his ease and able to enjoy the pleasant surroundings, the interesting talk, and the well-served table that furnished such a contrast to the slap and scurry of boarding-house meals. As he rose to say good night, Mr. Graham called him into the library, and then told him of his success, congratulating him in a cordial, sincere tone that went straight to the lad's heart. A few minutes later they were chatting with pleasant frankness about the school.

"What we need, Melvin," said the Principal, "is a stronger student influence toward what is right and manly and clean. How to secure this is our greatest problem. I wish you could help me to solve it."

Dick shook his head.

"I'm afraid it's beyond me, sir."

"You see," went on Mr. Graham, "we teachers have our hands tied by the very fact that we are teachers. As a moral force we are little better than preachers — dull ones at that. Among the students the dominant ideas and standards are those which the students themselves conceive. And, strange to say, what this student ideal shall be, really depends upon about a score of the older boys in school. The opportunity those boys have for a permanent influence for good, in setting a high pace for their three or four hundred fellows, is one that comes to few grown men in the activities of the world."

"I don't understand that," said Dick.

"That's just the trouble. I didn't, either, when I was in your place. Now I do, but my chance as a student has gone. Often, as I see a boy looked up to and followed from his ability or athletic importance, I long to slip into his shoes for a time and let him feel the responsibilities of my position. There is so much that can be done by a single boy who stands honestly and proudly for principle, always doing what is right because it's right."

"He is wild," thought Dick, as he walked thoughtfully home to his room. "No one boy can do anything in a school like this."

CHAPTER XI

SPRINGTIME

Spring is the fascinating season for the Seaton boy. Sombre and dull though the winter may have been, with its unremitting routine and the steady drive of ambitious teachers, the unpleasantness is wholly forgotten in the glories and distractions of the spring term. In Seaton Nature concentrates her favors on the summer months. The rows of elms along the old village street put on their thick summer thatch. The grass under the trees in the Academy yard grows luxuriant and tempting, like a green velvet cushion. On the picturesque river that winds deliberately in and out among woods and pastures, one can paddle a league upstream without getting a direct mile from one's starting-point, apparently far from human habitation, and yet almost within sound of the recitation-bell. Below the dam and the rocky falls that drew the first Puritan settlers, the sea-water sets against the wharves where the coal schooners unload their burdens and then tow down the long stretch of river and bay to the ocean mouth. There are quaint, old landmarks of pre-revolutionary adventure to visit, and wild spots in the woods to explore, and hills to climb for views of mountain and sea. For one who is indifferent to such attractions, there are the special events of school life crowded thick into the last weeks of the year — the school sports, the "track meet" with Hillbury, the great base-ball game, the class games, and all the beguiling confusion of literary, social, and political happenings. The boating and the tramps and the "scrub" ball games Dick enjoyed to the utmost, but the organized school sports he shunned as the burnt child shuns the fire. Through Curtis he was invited to join a secret society, and Thayer urged him to send contributions to the "Seatonian." Both invitations were tempting, but he refused them both.

With foot-ball the case seemed different. He was committed to this, and to do his full duty here would require all the effort and thought he had to spare. When the season returned, he would be one of the few who had had experience and could be relied on. Already Curtis was finding him a valuable assistant. The nucleus of the team continued their weekly meetings, and on the Campus, even in the heart of the base-ball season, when the school thought and talked of nothing but the base-ball game, Curtis and Melvin were laboring hard with promising recruits.

Dick practised kicking assiduously, but, as he was himself forced to acknowledge, without making any great improvement. As there was no one in school who knew more about kicking than he did, it was impossible to get instruction or even to make sure of proper methods of practice. For aught that he knew, he was merely exaggerating the worst faults of his form instead of fitting himself for superior work in the fall, and both he and Curtis felt discouraged.

Early in May came a new gleam of hope. Hammond, the captain of the Harvard Eleven, was coming up to talk to them.

All the organized team, now eight in number, were gathered in Curtis's room. Hammond was a big, brawny fellow with a strong, sensible face and an agreeable voice, who spoke with the assurance of a veteran, and was heard by the schoolboys as the supreme authority.

"I've a twofold interest in coming here," he said toward the end of his remarks: "first, I want to see my old school keep her position in athletics as well as in other things; secondly, I am anxious to get good recruits for future college teams. Probably none of you will be in college in my time, but I want to turn your thoughts early in the right direction, and make sure that such foot-ball material as comes to us is properly started and trained. If anything of real value can be accomplished by solitary practice, it is in the way of kicking. You can't make a good punter in two months; he must be started right and wisely coached, and then be made to practise unceasingly — the longer the better for the team he is to play on. I can't do much for the rest of you except encourage you and answer questions, but the kickers I might help. Who are your kicking backs, Curtis?"

"Melvin, here, is one," said the captain, laying his hand on Dick's shoulder.

"Well, you have a responsible task," said the college man, as he turned to Dick. "I've known games saved a dozen times by the kicking back. Sometimes it is simply impossible to get within your enemy's twenty-yard line, and then only a lucky drop will enable you to score. If you muff or fumble, the enemy gets the ball and your team goes to pieces. A back who is always sure on catches, always punts safely, and can place his kicks where he wants them, is like an eighth man in the line; he furnishes courage for the whole team. To-morrow I'll go out with you and see what you are doing."

The next day Dick had his first real instruction in the art. Hammond showed him how to hold the ball and how to aim it, the step forward to the punt, the leg swing, the precise way in which the foot should strike the ball, and how to direct it for a long, low, or a high punt; then he touched upon drop-kicking and the difficult problem of setting the ball for a place kick and judging the wind. It was an attempt to crowd into half an hour the elements that require months to teach and practise in detail. Dick listened and watched, and tried with all his soul; for whether he succeeded or failed in becoming a great kicker, he was determined at least to master the directions. Yet how discouraging it was to see Hammond so obviously exerting himself to avoid punting over the schoolboy's head; and how easy the collegian found it to drop between the posts from the forty-yard line!

"Practice and coaching is what you need, Melvin," said Hammond, finally. "Don't be discouraged. Try to learn one thing at a time. A summer's work with the right man would put you ahead amazingly. I suppose you haven't any one at home to help you?"

"There's an old Yale player named Carleton, who always spends some time in my town during the summer," answered Dick. "He would help me, I think."

"Carleton — what's his first name?"

"Robert."

"Why, that must be Bob Carleton, who was a famous back just before I entered college — about the best drop-kicker Yale ever had. I can't give you many points over him, I can tell you. Get as much out of him as you can. Yale coaching is worth having, even for a Harvard man."

CHAPTER XII

MARTIN IN A CORNER

On the day after Hammond's visit, Martin dropped in after dinner on one of his frequent calls. His ostensible purpose was to get help on an exercise in Greek composition; for he had no false pride about receiving aid from one of a lower class, nor conscientious scruples as to being lifted over obstacles which he ought to surmount himself. What he really wanted, however, was to talk, as was obvious from the indifference with which he received the answers to his questions, and the wholly leisurely air with which he dropped into the only comfortable chair in the room. It happened that Melvin had only one recitation that afternoon, and his preparation for that was pretty well finished; so he felt he had time for his guest. Hammond's encouragement and counsel had given him new enthusiasm for the great fight, and put him in better humor for facing the pessimism of the critical senior.

Why Martin found so much pleasure in visiting him and in pouring his opinions into the middler's unsympathetic ears, Dick could not understand. Their temperaments and outward circumstances were wholly unlike; their opinions were frequently at variance. The set with whom one naturally drifted was different from that of the other. There were a score of fellows who would have delighted in the reputation of being friends of Martin, who had no possible interest in Melvin; while to some of Melvin's friends Martin was highly objectionable. The intimacy, as Dick felt, had not been of his own seeking, and he sacrificed nothing in keeping it. Martin's agreeable qualities Dick enjoyed; his questionable principles, or lack of principles, the middler frankly condemned.

"What has Hammond been doing here?" asked the senior.

"Looking for material and giving us advice."

"Material!" sniffed Martin; "there's little of it here."

"He seemed to think there is, anyway, and he ought to know," returned Dick, good-naturedly.

"Of course he's a loyal son of the old school, and all that," Martin answered, "and probably is well disposed to us, but you'll find that he goes to Hillbury and all the rest of the schools, and gives them the same flattery."

"Why should he flatter us? Isn't it to his advantage to get the material into his college?"

"Certainly, you ninny, but they have scores of men like the best of us down there now — more than they can possibly use. All he wants is to prevent any of this overflow from going to Yale or some other college."

"Do you think that's his whole object?" asked Dick, somewhat disquieted.

"That's about all there is in it. He goes all about, stirs the school players up, makes them think the Varsity captain is keeping places for them, and when they get to college, they find they are just unknown individuals in a company of two hundred candidates, and they'll be lucky if they make substitute on a class team. It's all rank selfishness. Hammond's just a dog in the manger — a fellow who takes all the pie to prevent any one else getting it, though he's so full he can't eat any himself."

"There may be something in what you say," said Dick, thoughtfully, "but I don't believe it all. Hammond wants all the material he can get, so as to be able to make a better selection; and I'm sure he'll help us all he can."

"All he can won't be much, I can tell you. Those great personages never have much time for schoolboys; they like to appear in a burst of glory like Agamemnon or Achilles, or some such hero, and dazzle you fellows a bit with their mighty presence; but, after all, what's the use? Even Hammond can't make experienced players out of greenhorns, or turn fatties like Curtis into fast runners."

Dick smiled. "You'd better not say that when John's around. Fast runner or not, I'll risk him against any centre Hillbury ever had. But you're right about one thing — we need some speedy backs, and I can't for the life of me see where we are going to find them."

"Speaking of running," said Martin, "there's a man in your class whom you never would pick out for your squad, and yet I'll bet he can outrun any man you've got."

"Who's that?" cried Dick, starting up eagerly.

"His name is Dickinson."

Melvin threw himself back with a laugh. "Dickinson! Why, after Fletcher, he's the most exclusive grind in the class.

He's never taken an athletic step in his life."

"That shows how little you know about it," returned Martin, complacently, "and how incompetent you fellows are to develop what little material you have. In the first place, Dickinson has the build of a speeder — tall, long from the ankle to the knee, short in the thigh, and sinewy. Secondly, he has the stride and the running gait. I saw him cutting for chapel the other morning, and the way he covered the ground was a caution. The fact is, Dick, you're a very good fellow in your way, and you mean excellently well, but you are really too beastly ignorant for the business you're in, and John Curtis doesn't know as much as you do." And Martin grinned a self-satisfied, Martinesque grin, and looked sleepily out of his half-closed eyes across the table at his meditating host.

"Much obliged," answered Dick, grimly.

A silence ensued while Martin hunted for another topic for discussion, and Melvin was endeavoring to estimate the proportion of truth in his visitor's statement. Before the conversation could be resumed, the door opened abruptly to admit Philip, and closed behind him.

"There's a gentleman coming up the stairs to call on you, Dick," he drawled. "I think it's your minister, Mr. Lee. I heard him talking with Mrs. Hayward."

"Great Scott!" cried Martin, jumping up, "let me get out! I can't face him after that sociable."

But the smiling Philip still stood with his back to the door. "He'll probably want to see you, too, as you go to his church," said the boy, with a twinkle in his eye. "Besides, you can't help it now, for he's right on the stairs."

The senior's hand was already on the boy's shoulder when a knock sounded at the door. Dick started to open it, while Martin, looking around in consternation, gasped in a stage whisper, "Wait a second!" and made a dart for the closet door. He had barely time to shelter himself when the visitor entered.

Mr. Lee was a clever man, as well as a good pastor and an interesting preacher. A single glance at the roguish Philip, the confused Melvin, and the self-closing closet door was enough to suggest what had taken place, but he gave no sign of his suspicion. He took the chair Dick offered him, and, sitting down opposite the closet, soon overcame the lad's shyness, and put him at his ease. Philip, who, as an attendant at another church, could not be expected to regard the call as personal, gave one ear to the conversation and both eyes to the closet door.

It drew near three o'clock, when, as Dick well knew, Martin was due at school, and, with his precarious footing, could not possibly afford to cut. The clergyman considerately asked if Dick had a recitation at that hour. Mindful of the victim in the closet, the boy devoutly wished he had, but was forced to answer in the negative.

Then Philip, who began to fear that the caller was preparing to go, and that Martin would escape after all, spoke up: —

"There is another student in the house, Mr. Lee, who attends your church."

"Yes, I know — Mr. Martin," replied the clergyman. "I had hoped to see him also."

"He was here only a few minutes ago," added Philip, eagerly. "Let me see if I can find him."

The lad slipped out with these words, without allowing Mr. Lee a chance to stop him, and after some minutes of absence reappeared, at the first stroke of the recitation-bell, to report that Martin was not in his room, and to excuse himself for his recitation. As he shut the door, he threw a glance of exultation at Dick that added to the confusion of the host, and still further confirmed the visitor in his purpose. The student's answers grew briefer and wilder; the clergyman became more animated and quite indifferent to the lapse of time. The closet door, meantime, was bewitched; Dick followed its movements with terror. It would open a couple of inches, then close, then open again, in the most unaccountable and irresolute fashion. Fortunately, Mr. Lee seemed too much absorbed in the conversation to observe it. Finally, as he embarked on what promised to be a very long account of the sports of his school days, the door flew open with a jerk, and Martin, with downcast eyes and face red with embarrassment, issued forth. At the sight of the redoubtable one actually discomfited, Dick lost control of himself, and burst into a peal of laughter.

Wrath was fast getting the better of embarrassment in the unwilling débutant, when Mr. Lee, with surprising calmness, put an end to the scene by joining in the laugh and saying, as he held out his hand:—

"How do you do, Mr. Martin? I was afraid I was not to see you. Perhaps this call may count for you both. But you must not let me detain you if you have a recitation."

For the first time in his life Martin was speechless.

At four, Phil came dancing in, brimful of elation. The joy of his triumph over his tormentor had so flooded his mind as to crowd everything else out; he had failed on every question he had been asked at the recitation. But the victory was cheap — dirt cheap! What a beautiful retribution for all the insults he had received! The story sped the rounds of the school the next day, and every boy of Martin's acquaintance questioned him and jeered at him until Martin felt that he would rather have taken a dozen whippings. But he never showed a trace of anger toward Phil. Perhaps he thought that the little boy deserved his innings. And while Phil, convinced that the catastrophe was due to his own cleverness, was laughing loud and publicly, Mr. Lee, who was the only person not deceived in the whole transaction, enjoyed his joke quietly by himself.

CHAPTER XIII

A GREAT DISCOVERY

The more Dick considered what Martin had told him of Dickinson, the more curious he felt to put the senior's statements to the test. He watched his classmate as he left the recitation room, marked his step, and guessed on his weight and strength. Dickinson was not merely tall and sinewy; he was solid as well, and walked with a free and elastic step, holding his shoulders in a square, erect fashion that indicated sound and capacious lungs. Dick was no expert in physiology, and these signs appealed to him only in a general way; but he knew enough to guess at their meaning and to wonder that he had not noticed them before.

Dickinson had a way of coming to recitation ten minutes early so as to go over particular passages before the hour began. Melvin had not infrequently joined him in these final quizzes. He took the first opportunity offered, after the scene of the last chapter, to bring Dickinson to the subject.

"What do you do for exercise these days?" he asked.

"The Gym," replied Dickinson, laconically. "Take walks and run a little."

"Where do you run?" asked Melvin. "I've never seen you running."

"Oh, just about the streets or out on a country road. I often go out evenings for a little dash before bedtime."

"That's an idea," returned Melvin. "I'd like to join you some night if you don't take me too far."

"Come over to-night, then," said Dickinson. "Any time between nine and ten I shall be ready."

At nine that night Melvin appeared at Dickinson's room dressed for a sprint. As he entered, Dickinson, who sat with a green shade over his eyes, plodding away at the next day's lessons, looked up in surprise.

"I thought I might as well be prepared," said Dick, laughing. "I don't know how much of a chase you are going to lead me. I don't mind sweating when I'm dressed for it."

"Oh, yes, the run," said Dickinson, rising and putting away his eye-shade. "I had forgotten all about it." And then he added jocosely, and yet with a perceptible undertone of regret: "You see, not being one of you athletic fellows, I don't carry these things in my mind as you would. I'll be ready in two minutes."

"Athletics have their drawbacks as well as advantages," said Dick, following the tone rather than the words of his classmate. "One gets lots of fun out of them, of course, and sometimes glory; but, on the other hand, there's the worry and loss of time, and if one's beaten, he's never forgiven. Now you can just devote your whole energy to your books, and you get on. You must stand about as near the top of the class as a fellow can reach."

"It gets monotonous all the same," answered Dickinson, hurrying into his clothes. "I like to work as well as any one, and I have to do so in order to keep myself here, but sometimes I can't help feeling sore as I see the real life of the school slipping by without even touching me, while some blockhead with money, or an empty-headed dude in big-checked trousers, or a burly lout who can play foot-ball, has a front seat at class meetings, gets elected to the offices, and is known all over school."

Dick laughed outright. "I hope those remarks aren't to be taken personally."

"Of course I don't refer to you," Dickinson made haste to add. "You know well enough what I mean."

"Yes, I do," replied Melvin, now serious again. "But, honestly, I think you're more than half wrong. There must be something in these fellows, or they couldn't get on as they do. You can't shut yourself up in a room with your books and expect fellows to hunt you out."

"I don't expect that at all," said Dickinson, shortly.

"You ought to break out of your shell," persisted Dick, "get out among the fellows, make them see you're worth knowing, and take your share in things."

"That's easy enough to say," replied Dickinson. "Well, come on. I'm ready at last."

Leaving Carter, they trotted along down the slope to the side street.

"Do you run on your toes?" asked Dickinson.

"Not much," returned Melvin. "I never could succeed in doing it any length of time. I suppose it's the right way, though."

"You really have to if you're going fast," continued the other. "The Indians are said to have run so, but I don't believe they were really a match for the white man in anything."

"The Greeks were the champions," said

Dick, "but I don't remember ever reading anything about their method of running."

The talk had to stop, for the pace was growing quicker, and Dick found it advisable to husband his breath. They emerged into a wide street, and arrived at the corner where the Newacre road branched off. Here the macadam was new and smooth, while a hundred yards or more ahead an electric light swung at a street crossing, its slanting rays revealing every little obstacle in the path.

"Let's try a spurt to the light!" cried Melvin.

"All right!" Dickinson responded cheerfully. He had hardly got the words out of his mouth when Melvin was off with a bound, gaining a start of ten yards before his companion was well under way.

Dick more than half expected to be called back, for the advantage which he had taken was so obviously unfair that no honest race could result. But he heard not a word of protest. Instead came the sound of the steady, scraping beat of an elastic step, mingling on the silent night air with the heavier sound of his own feet, but not in unison with it, for the pursuing step was slightly slower. A moment later Dick was conscious that the slower step was drawing nearer; and a few seconds after, when, with every grain of muscle and nerve he possessed put into his speed, he got beneath the lamp, there was Dickinson at his side, running easily in a long, swinging stride, and smiling contentedly down on his companion.

Dick stopped and gasped, breathing hard. "That was hardly a fair start."

"No," said Dickinson, coolly, "it wasn't; but it didn't make much difference. I'm not much at starting. Never had any practice."

They were soon off again, jogging out on the Newacre road for half a mile and then turning back. Here Melvin found some little consolation for his first defeat, for he felt at home in the steady slower pace of long distance running, and he perceived that his companion showed signs of weakness on their return. They stopped again for breathing, somewhat farther away from the electric light than before, and Dick, partly to satisfy his curiosity and partly in the hope of balm for his wounded pride, proposed another sprint.

"On condition that it shall be the last," replied Dickinson. "I'm not a race-horse nor an athlete like you, and I've had about all I want for to-night."

"We'll start squarely this time," Melvin said. "I'll count three, and then we'll go. Look out for stones."

Again the start was uneven, but not so much so as before. Dick got off three yards ahead and ran steadily, confident that, weakened by the strain of the mile just ended, his companion would find a high speed impossible to maintain for the longer distance. But he was doomed to a still greater disappointment. At fifty yards Dickinson went past him like the wind.

When Dick arrived at the light, his friend was sitting on a stone by the roadside, wiping his face with his handkerchief.

There was a silence, while Dick gasped for wind and sense. Such spurts were as unusual for him as the longer distances for Dickinson. "Where did you learn to run?" he finally got breath to ask.

"I never learned; I always knew how. It comes naturally to me, as playing to a puppy. My father was a fast runner as a young man, and my uncle, too, before he died."

They started slowly homeward.

"I suppose you've won lots of races," said Dick.

Dickinson laughed. "Never ran a race in my life — except the kind we have run to-night. My uncle once strained himself in a race, and later got consumption, so my father always discouraged my trying such things. I've never had much interest in them, either."

"Were you often beaten in these little

trials?" persisted Dick, whose eagerness to develop a runner for the foot-ball team had been entirely swallowed up by his sense of personal discomfiture. He had always taken pride in the thought that he was a good runner, and here was a fellow who left him behind as a railroad train leaves a country horse, and the revelation was not agreeable.

"I think not," replied Dickinson. "In fact, I don't believe I ever found any one who was really faster. To tell the truth, I've never given much thought to the subject. I don't expect to earn my living by my legs, and my mind has been on other things."

They parted at the steps of Carter, and Dick went home bewildered. Dickinson had actually never found a man to beat him, and yet he spoke of it as casually and simply as he would of the color of his father's house or the size of his shoes! And there was no trick about the matter, either, for Dick had seen with his own eyes, or rather felt with his own legs, the runner's speed; and as he went over the conversation again from the first mention of the evening running in the recitation room to the final good-by at the steps of the dormitory, there had not been a single word or act to throw suspicion on Dickinson's straightforwardness and honesty. In everything Dick himself had been the proposer. No wonder he was puzzled, for he had not lived long enough to learn that the real masters are uniformly unostentatious and modest, their mastery being a thing so self-understood and natural as to remove all ground for vanity.

Dick, however, was not a master, and his vanity had been touched. It was some time before he brought himself to see that his overwhelming defeat as a runner meant a greater triumph for those who were seeking foot-ball material. "It isn't that I'm so slow," he said to himself, as he got into bed, "but that Dickinson is so fast. If I can beat, on a sprint, four out of every five I run across, what must he be!"

And then came the thought that kept him tossing on his pillow for an uneasy hour. If Dickinson was so promising for foot-ball, he was even more valuable to both class and school for the track sports. It was clearly his duty to come out and do his best for the school athletics. Such a course was also to his advantage from other considerations, for in no way could he so surely win the general recognition which he coveted, as by flashing out as a new athletic star upon the school horizon.

But how to induce him to come out? A diffident fellow often feels the greatest reluctance to expose himself on the field to the criticisms of the spectators; and Dickinson, who had apparently trained himself to a contempt for school athletics, was sure to make stubborn resistance. How was this obstinacy to be conquered? Dick fell asleep with the problem unsolved.

CHAPTER XIV

CATCHING THE DARK HORSE

Curtis's round face took on a comical smile as Melvin next day related the happenings of the evening.

"Beat you all out, did he? You must have enjoyed that!"

"It wasn't a question of my enjoyment," replied Dick, with dignity; "I was working for the cause."

"Oh, of course!" and John burst into a laugh.

Dick grew indignant. "If you are going to talk like that, I may as well drop the whole business. You're more interested in this thing than I am."

"Oh, come now, Dick, don't be foolish," returned Curtis, sobering down; "we aren't going to split over a laugh. I couldn't help being amused to think of your going out as an expert to judge the fellow's pace, and then getting left so far behind you couldn't tell how he ran."

"I'm no sprinter and don't pretend to be one."

"You're a good runner, just the same," replied Curtis, shaking his head, "and he must be a wonder to beat you like that. Did you say anything to him about the foot-ball?"

"Of course not. I tell you he has peculiar ideas and must be worked cautiously. If I had asked him right out, he would have said no, and stuck to it."

John opened his eyes. "He must be queer."

"He is — to one who doesn't understand him. You see he has lived by himself all the year, poring over his books from morning to night, until he has got thoroughly tired of it. He's dissatisfied and wants some variety, but he doesn't know what is the matter with him, nor how to get out of his rut. Besides that he has a grouch against athletics, and we shall have to argue it out of him."

"If he's the sulky, want-to-be-flattered kind, I wouldn't have him if he were Hercules himself," said John, decidedly. "I don't want any such material."

"I don't think he is," Melvin made haste to answer. "I only meant that we must come at it gradually. If we can once get him fixed, he'll stick like a leech."

"Well, how are you going to manage it, then?"

"We must first persuade him to try the track sports. That will be easy for him and won't take much time. Then, when we've put him through, and he's had a taste of popularity and glory, we'll introduce the subject of foot-ball."

"Good!" cried John, "and it will be a great service to the school, too, if he's the marvel you pretend. Let's ask him to-day. It's only a fortnight to the sports, and that gives us little enough time to get him into shape."

"Not so fast, you old battering-ram, unless you want to scare him off!" replied Dick, laughing. "As long as I can keep him sprinting, he's getting training enough. He's my fish, I tell you, and I want time to land him."

"Well, have your own way," said Curtis, with a sigh; "only don't be too confoundedly foxy."

That night the two runners took another direction and brought up at the Campus. They sat down to rest on the benches along the track, and talked of anything but running. As they sat there absorbed, the moon peeped over the fringe of woods that edged the field and glanced down at the smooth, flat track that lay at their feet, stretching from darkness into darkness like a gray ribbon.

"Let's try the track to-night," cried Dick, starting down the tier of seats; "give me fifteen yards in the two-twenty, and I'll beat you."

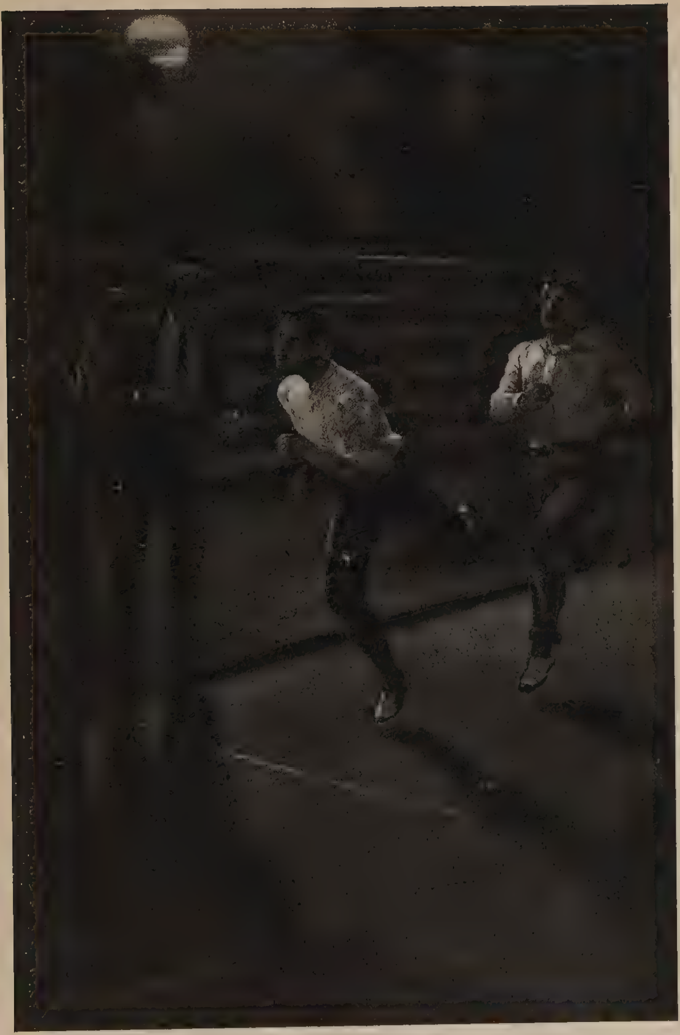
"That's too much," said Dickinson, laughing. "The idea of an athlete like you asking a handicap of a bookworm!"

Melvin got his fifteen yards, nevertheless, and gained five more on the start. They finished on the curve so that Dickinson had to run outside for the latter portion of the distance, but when they reached the post, the runners were so close together that neither could tell which was ahead. Both were breathing hard, for Melvin had put his whole soul into the sprint and Dickinson had been seriously driven.

"These distances bother me," said the latter, as they picked up their sweaters and turned homeward. "I held back too long that time."

"You got there just the same," said Melvin. "How some of these fellows would have stared if they had seen you to-night!"

"I suppose so," replied Dickinson, musingly. "They'd certainly be surprised to see me here at all."



DICKINSON TOTTERED IN A FEW FEET BEHIND HIS RIVAL
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On the following night Dick stayed at home, but, on the second after, both were again at the Campus. To Dickinson's surprise they found Curtis and Marks gossiping on the benches.

"We'll do a quarter, to-night," said Dick, after they had talked for a time, "and you're going to give me twenty-five yards."

"For the last time, then," said Dickinson. "You're making me work quite too hard for pleasure."

"Let me start you," proposed Curtis, as the runners took the track.

"Wait just a moment until I light this cigarette," said Marks, turning his back on the party and fumbling in his pocket.

Marks was still holding the lighted match in his hand when Curtis sent the pair off with a true professional start. A quarter mile is a hard race, as the speed maintained is nearly maximum, and maximum speed for this distance puts a tremendous strain on muscles, lungs, and heart. Dickinson tottered in a few feet behind his rival, cursing himself for his folly, but running the race out with characteristic determination. How good it seemed to be gathered into such big, cordial arms as John Curtis's, and how restful those bare, wooden benches to his trembling knees! The whole-souled friendliness of these fellows, who usually passed him with a formal word, touched him in a sensitive spot. In this cordial atmosphere, unused as he was to it, his natural reserve melted away and he also became cordial.

All four walked down together. Marks stopped on the way for another cigarette, and Curtis looked over his shoulder as he lighted it.

"Gee whiz, look at that!" ejaculated Marks, in an undertone, pointing at the stop-watch. "I wouldn't have believed it."

"It's within two seconds of the school record," whispered John; "at night, too, and in gymnasium slippers."

As they mounted the stairs at Carter, Curtis whispered a word in Melvin's ear and was answered by a nod of approval. The party filed into Dickinson's room and sat down, occupying nearly all the chairs the room contained. Here, however, the conversation flagged immediately, for Marks and Curtis waited for Melvin to begin, and Melvin for a good opening, while Dickinson, finding his visitors suddenly silent, lapsed into silence himself.

"Dickinson," said Melvin, finally, "we want you to do us a great favor."

"A favor!" exclaimed Dickinson, opening his eyes in astonishment; "what can it be?"

"Run in the school sports."

Dickinson stared blankly from one serious face to another. Then a look of intelligence flashed over his face.

"Oh, it's a little trick you've been playing on me!" He spoke with a dubious smile on his lips that Dick did not at all like, but the latter went boldly on, nevertheless.

"In a way, yes. If I hadn't, I never could have got you to show your powers.

Now we know, and you know also, or ought to, that you're the fastest man in the school — that you have the two-twenty and the quarter right in your fist. All you have to do is to run the races and take the prizes. In the name of the class and the school and everything else, we ask you to come out and do it."

"It's all guesswork," replied Dickinson, with tightening lips and brightening eye. "There are probably half a dozen fellows here who can beat me. I'm not going out there to make myself ridiculous."

"Well, Marks, what do you say to that?"

Marks pulled out the watch. "Just this: that hand shows the exact time, within a fifth of a second, of your quarter to-night. A second and a half better would have smashed the Seaton-Hillbury record."

"And that second and a half you would have made up, if you had run in the daylight with proper shoes and dress," added Curtis.

"I wish I had the chance," said Marks,

longingly; "I shouldn't have to be asked twice, I can tell you."

Poor Marks! Athletics were the craze and the disappointment of his life. He was brimful of athletic lore, talked sports continually, and fairly worshipped a champion, but physically he was as incompetent as a poodle.

"I can't afford the time, I haven't the outfit, and I've never had any training," said Dickinson, piling together all the objections he could think of.

"It doesn't take much time," said Dick; "perhaps, all told, an hour a day."

"The outfit is easy," added John. "I'll lend you shoes, and running trousers you can buy for a trifle."

"And as to training," put in Marks, "a man who can run as you did to-night must be in training already. If you mean practice and coaching, there's the school coach to give instruction, and all of us to help."

"The only thing you need special practice in is starting," said Dick. "I don't doubt you could win the hundred, too, if so much didn't depend on starting, but we've got a good man there in Tommy Travers, and two races are all you can run."

"I should say so," said Dickinson, "and more than I can run. I'll agree to try it, however, on one condition — that all you fellows try something, too."

"I can't," said Marks, dismally. "I'm not good for anything."

"I'm down for the hammer and shot, anyway," said Curtis.

"You, then, Melvin," said Dickinson. "I'll run if you do, and not otherwise. I'm not going to be the only surprise on the field."

"I can't run," protested Dick. "You know I can't. Haven't you left me behind every time we've tried together?"

"On the short runs I have," replied Dickinson; "on the longer ones you may be a greater marvel than you fellows are trying to make me believe that I am."

"That's right, too," cried Marks, starting up. "I've always said Melvin could do the mile if he only would. He ought to try it."

"Why, there are two good men running that now," groaned Dick. "I should simply make an ass of myself."

"You've got more sand than either of them," said Marks, decisively. "It's sand that counts in the long runs."

"Well, do as you please," said Dickinson, in a way that Dick knew was final. "I hold to my proposition. If you really think it's as important as you pretend, you'll be willing to make some sacrifice to get me out. If you don't care to do this, I know the value to set on your words."

"I suppose I shall have to, then," sighed Dick, after a pause; "but it's very unfair."

Curtis jumped up. "Shake on it, then, and let's be off. It's after hours already. We'll see you to-morrow, Dickinson, old boy, and set you going."

Soberly Melvin followed the pair downstairs, wondering whether he was the victim of wile or of accident. Marks was performing a breakdown on the porch.

"Do you love Dickinson or hate me," exclaimed Dick, angrily, "that you shove me into a hole like that?"

Marks snapped his fingers. "I don't care that for either of you. It just makes me wild to think how we'll do Frenchy Hartley. He's done nothing but swell and admire himself ever since he won second in the quarter at the Interscholastic. When Dickinson gets through with him, there won't be enough left to carry off the field."

"I'm not so sure about that," said John. "Our man is terribly green."

CHAPTER XV

TRAINING

SWALLOWING his chagrin as best he could, Melvin, on the following day, reported to the coach on the Campus and took his first prescription of three laps with more or less equanimity. At heart he was uncertain whether to consider himself a victim or a martyr. From either point of view he was unfortunate. While sharing the general admiration for a fleet runner or an athletic hero, he had never felt the slightest inclination toward track athletics. Compared with the constant excitement and variety of foot-ball, it seemed a very unattractive occupation to struggle monotonously day after day against the inexorable stop-watch, over the same old painful distance, trying to beat to-day what your rival did yesterday, or you yourself last week, and staking everything at last on the outcome of a few seconds' work. Especially repellent to him were the long runs the training for which is so largely practice in bearing punishment. Here the element of fun appeared entirely lacking.

Ferguson and Orr, the veterans at the mile, greeted their new rival effusively.

"Hello, Melvin!" cried Ferguson; "going to join us, are you? Good for you!"

"I suppose he'll beat us both," said Orr.

"He will if he can run any," added Ferguson, in a burst of assumed modesty. "We're easy. That is, Orr's easy and I am easier."

"You needn't worry about me," Melvin replied. "I'm not dangerous. It will be lucky for me if I can finish on the same side of the field with you. I shall save one of you from being last, anyway."

When this conversation occurred on the morning of his first appearance, Dick really meant what he said. As much could not be asserted of his friendly competitors, who, despite the modesty of their words, at heart had not the slightest fear of him. A few days later, however, Melvin would not have been so humble. The track training, on closer acquaintance, proved not so monotonous after all. Dick found interesting features and important problems which he had not suspected. First, he must learn to pace himself, then to make a correct estimate of his powers, and apply his strength so as to get the best result. If he had any ability as a runner, exactly in what did it consist? Was he to strive for a steady pace all through the mile, or make higher speed for the first quarters, and spurt on nerve at the finish? He awaited with eager interest the achievements of each day, not merely because they showed his gain or loss, but because they determined the style of running which he ought to adopt.

At the end of a week he had a trial mile. Phil Poole started him, and Marks held the watch. The result, though not phenomenal, was encouraging. Then, for the next few days of practice, he set himself with the aid of this experience and record to cut down his time. He had no hope of winning, but he was bound to do himself and the class credit.

Meantime Dickinson was getting quietly into condition. He had made a very modest appearance on the field, dodging the hours usually chosen for practice, and running his tests alone with the coach or with one of the select few present to criticise. Dick soon became too absorbed in his own problem to follow the practice of his fleeter friend, but Marks and Curtis were always on hand to lend encouragement. Their classmate, Travers, the hundred-yards man, also entered the plot with enthusiasm, leading the long-legged recruit many a short dash, and helping decidedly in the serious matter of starting.

So unassuming was the entrance of the new contestant upon the field, that for a week no one paid any attention to him.

In fact, if it had not been for Martin, he might have slipped through the last days unnoticed, and appeared at the sports as unexpected as the Black Knight at the tournament at Ashby. But one morning, as Martin sat sunning himself on the Campus benches, and wondering whether there was to be anything really stirring in the approaching contests, he marked the new runner's presence and grew suddenly interested.

That afternoon, as Curtis sat in Dick's room, waiting for his host to work out a quadratic for him, Martin stuck in his head. "Grinding?" he asked.

Dick was absorbed in his problem, but Curtis made answer: "Hello! Come in, won't you? It's all right. He's just trying to unravel one of those confounded quadratic snarls. I don't see what's the use of them. If you get the principle, why isn't that enough, without working in the whole alphabet?"

"It's like making you run up to a million to prove that you can count," rejoined Martin, dropping into a chair. "I've no respect for the men who make text-books and examination papers. There isn't one problem in a hundred that's practical or sensible. They lie awake nights to think them up, and then expect every fellow to be as much interested in the things as they are themselves. It seems to me that, considering the brain energy consumed, there is mighty little originality in them."

"Altogether too much for me," sighed Curtis.

"What I mean is this," explained Martin. "There's the train problem, and the clock problem, and the rectangular-field problem, and the A, B, and C work-by-the-day problem, and the money-at-interest problem, and the farmer-and-his-sheep problem, and perhaps one other. They ring the changes on these, mix 'em up and draw 'em in pairs and threes, until you don't know whether you're digging a ditch or counting cows, but it's the same set of dummies all the time."

"If they're so simple, why did you flunk them in the exams?" grinned Curtis.

"I didn't say they were simple; I said they weren't original. It's just the same with Latin. There are new names and new texts and new definitions and new grammars. You spend ten dollars for a new set of books, and think you're on a straight and easy path, and you find the same old conjugations, the same old subjunctive, and the same number of lines in the Virgil lesson."

"You're soured," said Curtis.

"In geometry there are originals enough, anyway," put in Melvin, wheeling around.

"We're too old for puns," retorted Martin, gravely. "Talk sense."

Dick looked at his watch.

"Am I keeping you from practice?" asked the senior.

"N-no," replied Dick. "It isn't quite time yet."

"It would be the act of a friend if I kept you altogether," said Martin. "Those fellows will beat you terribly."

"Very likely," returned Dick, with a smile.

"It isn't so sure as you think," remarked Curtis.

"Then you've got that fellow Dickinson out, I see. I shouldn't have mentioned him if I had thought of your trying to push the poor fellow into the sports. He's good raw material for foot-ball, but he won't help you any in the runs. He's too inexperienced; I believe the pistol-shot would scare him."

"We'll see," smiled Dick.

"The fact is your class isn't worth much in the runs, is it?" Martin went on. "There's Orr and Ferguson in the mile, Morris in the half, — he's practically alone, — and Frenchy Hartley in the quarter and two-twenty — he's a fool, but he *can* run, — all seniors. Travers may win the hundred, and that's all you'll get."

"According to your view."

"According to the view of any one who isn't blind. It's our class that's at the head of everything. Without it the standard of athletics wouldn't be above a country high school."

Melvin kept his temper and continued to smile, estimating the senior's words at their true value, and preferring to keep silent and let the event speak. But John Curtis was not so easily controlled.

"I'll bet you we win a majority of those five runs," he cried eagerly, starting to his feet. "You fellows were always great brags. You'd better wait till you're sure before you talk so loud."

"I'll take you up; what will you bet?" replied the senior, coolly.

"I'll have no betting here," interposed Melvin. "If you fellows want to make fools of yourselves, go somewhere else. Let him talk, John. It doesn't hurt us at all, and the more he says, the harder it will be for him to take it back later on."

"You don't need to urge him; he'll crawl fast enough," said the exasperating Martin. "If you don't want to bet, I'll tell you what we'll do. If your class wins a majority of those runs, I'll give you a silk banner properly inscribed, and pull you around the square in a hand-cart. If you lose, you do the same for me."

"I accept," said Curtis, promptly. "It's understood that we mean first places only, and in just those five contests — no hurdles, nor jumps, nor shot-putting included. You're a witness, Dick, to the agreement."

"I'm a witness to a big piece of tomfoolery," retorted Melvin, savagely. "Why can't you be reasonable?"

The news of the incident spread immediately. In a school like Seaton there is always a half-suppressed yearning for excitement ready to flash into activity when the spark is applied. The wager proved a spark of surprising vigor. The school went wild with sympathy and enthusiasm. What had been looked forward to as an interesting series of individual contests became suddenly a strife of classes. The juniors joined the seniors, the lowest class the middlers. The school became two partisan camps — the Martin and the Curtis; while the five runs, less than half the day's programme, assumed an importance far beyond anything else. And Melvin and Dickinson found themselves to their dismay chief actors in a momentous drama. On them hung the hopes of the class.

CHAPTER XVI

THE RACES

On the day of the sports came a burst of the perfect weather with which nature sometimes indulges storm-beaten New Englanders late in May. A heavy rain the day before had cleared the atmosphere, leaving behind a coolness and fragrance that effectively resisted the steady glare of the sun. The branches of the tall trees across the Campus moved gently in the hardly perceptible breeze. The track was hard, the weather conditions perfect, and he himself "fit," and yet Dickinson felt for the moment, as he faced the gay and eager crowd looking down curiously on the new champion, that he would rather be in the wilds of Siberia than on this same green oval surrounded by boisterous friends. It was merely stage-fright or athlete's faintness, or whatever we may call it, which Dickinson was occasionally to feel years after, when his name and records were on every college athlete's tongue, and his prizes were to be counted by dozens. But this he did not know; he felt forlorn and weak, and his courage almost failed him.

"All out for the two-twenty!" His heart gave a great leap as the warning cry rang through the dressing rooms. "Come on, old man!" said Marks, who, with Todd, was tending the class racers, while Curtis was putting the shot. "Don't be discouraged if you don't get off well. You'll make it up on the straight stretch."

Dickinson nodded. He meant to get off well, none the less.

The contestants gathered at the line at the bend of the track. The shot-putting was interrupted to watch the start.

"He's got the outside," said Curtis. "Jackson and Fuller are between him and

Hartley. I'm glad to see that, for Frenchy is a savage fellow when he's crossed, and he might serve him a trick."

The runners stooped on their marks, then rose again.

"Some one's made a false start!" exclaimed Curtis. "Who is it?"

"Dickinson!" cried Melvin. "Don't you see? he's been put back a yard!"

"The fool!" said Curtis, angrily; "I was afraid he'd do it. He's so nervous he doesn't know what he's about."

The crack of the pistol broke in on his words. Around the curve came the runners, Hartley obviously ahead, having struck his pace at the very outset. As they swung into the straight stretch, the spectators could see that the leader was a good three yards ahead of the outside man, with Two and Three trailing still farther behind.

"Hartley! Hartley!" shouted the exulting seniors. "You've got it; keep it up!"

And then they saw the three yards diminish. It became two, then one, then still less. Twenty yards from the finish the runners were neck and neck. The middlers were confusedly bellowing as the men passed the line, but no one except those nearest the finish could tell who was really ahead. Dick and Curtis stood silent, straining their eyes, until little Marks was seen to leap out from a group near the judges and throw up his hat. Then Curtis jumped into the air with a yell that set off the middler section into another explosion. When the din subsided, the middlers were exclaiming to each other on the splendid race, and the seniors were looking glum.

After the jumps came the half-mile, and the seniors took heart again, as Morris led from start to finish, running the race as if he were alone. The hundred was next on the programme, and then the mile.

Dick was still at the dressing rooms having his last rubdown when Travers took his turn. It was a disappointment to him not to see the short dash. He heard the wild burst of yells, even more prolonged and disorderly than after Dickinson's victory, but he had no suspicion of what was occurring until Travers was led in fairly weeping with disappointment, supported by a sad-faced classmate on either side.

"What is it?" cried Melvin, jumping up.

"It's a burning shame," said Todd. "Tommy stumbled at the start and fell, and by the time he got his feet again, that miserable little Mallory was so far ahead of him that he couldn't quite catch him."

"A senior!" groaned Dick. "What shall we do?"

"To be beaten by an eleven-and-a-quarter-second man!" ejaculated Travers. "It's awful."

Just then Curtis and Marks appeared at the door with heavy faces.

"Dick, you've simply *got* to do it," said Curtis. "We're safe yet, if you win the mile and Dickinson the quarter. You can and must."

"You can if you will," added Marks. "You've got the sand."

And Melvin said not a word in reply, but the set of his lips and the glint of his eyes were answer enough.

"He'll run to the last ounce of his strength," said John, "but I don't believe he's up to it."

At the pistol-shot Ferguson took the lead immediately, with Orr close beside him and Melvin at their heels. Dick's plan had been to keep with the others at all costs and trust to his greater power of endurance for a spurt at the finish. Before they were half around the first lap, however, he was convinced that the pace was a killing one, and allowed himself to drop behind. The others were two rods ahead as the runners passed in front of the crowded benches, finishing the first quarter. Marks stood by the starting line with his watch as Melvin passed, and his voice, as he shouted "one-nine," was drowned in the din of friendly cries. Dick heard it, however, and the nod which he returned in acknowledgment gave no indication of the immense relief he felt at learning that his judgment as to speed was correct. "Keep your head, old boy!" he kept thinking. "They are deceiving themselves; they can't stand the pace they are setting. Steady now, steady!" But the men on the benches were worried at the widening interval. "It's hopeless!" groaned Curtis, as the contestants plodded their way along the back stretch, with Melvin at least three rods in the rear. "Why does he let them leave him so? He can't possibly get that distance back."

A second time the runners passed the benches. The two in the van showed signs of wear. Their steps were hurried, shorter, and less elastic. Melvin came on behind with the same measured pace. Again the low call from Marks at the finish line and the answering nod. The cheering had ceased, but the buzz of voices and the noise of shifting feet betrayed the excitement among the spectators.

They were now on the third quarter,— the most severe of all. Melvin's breath was coming quick and hard through his parched lips. His arms, tired with the constant clutching at the corks in his hands, were well-nigh numb with aching. His legs were like heavy weights. The blood seemed to be pouring to his brain and surging back in a burning flood to face and eyes. O for the delight, the luxury unspeakable, of dropping like a stone on the ground and lying there outstretched! How utterly insignificant in comparison were all the prizes and all the glory in the world!

And still he plodded steadily on, determined and hopeful. He knew what he was doing, while his companions apparently did not. In his brief practice he had learned to suffer on the track. Weary and weak he certainly was, but the others were probably more so — might be wavering even now. On, then, as long as he could gasp and move!

For the third time they neared the starting point. Melvin saw the figures wildly crowding to the sidelines, heard the tumultuous shouts of encouragement. "Keep it up, old boy, you're gaining." He dropped his eyes, pressed forward fifty steps, then looked ahead. They were nearer, unmistakably nearer! Strengthened by his success Dick lengthened out his stride, steadily drawing up on his opponents. On the back stretch Orr cast over his shoulder a glance of terror as fatal to success as that which Lot's wife cast at the burning city of Sodom. The sight of the foot-ball player at his heels was more than he could bear; Orr dropped exhausted into the grass beside the track.

And now it was Melvin and Ferguson alone to the finish. The senior felt the peril and put forth a last convulsive effort. But the overstrained muscles would not respond; the heavy legs would not lift. A few steps more and they were abreast, a few again and Melvin was ahead, beating the ground in the same even pace. The discouraged senior slackened speed while, with the joy of success lending spurs to determination, the victorious middler came down the home stretch, forcing his slackened muscles to a needless spurt.

They carried Melvin to the dressing rooms after that race, and while he lay feeling as if every separate nerve and sinew were actually breaking with exhaustion, they rubbed him and said pleasant things to him until he had forgotten the pain, or it had ceased to exist. In half an hour he had recovered sufficiently to crawl out to see the quarter, which was the last event. It was a different Dickinson who took his place on the marks for the final race. He had lost his nervousness and his dread. Cool as a veteran and confident, he started promptly and strong, overhauled Hartley in fifty yards, and then sped on like a deer, racing as if he loved it, as if intoxicated with delight in his own motion. And Dick, watching the graceful figure fleeting along the back stretch with that long, swinging, natural stride, felt the tears welling to his eyes, and ashamed of his weakness tried hard to press them back. It was not weariness alone nor happiness that started them, but simple joy in the strong, beautiful, rhythmic motion of a heaven-made runner.

The record in the quarter Dickinson smashed to flinders. It was a good record, too, of long standing and highly esteemed. The new record the school was sure would stand equally long, but it did not; Dickinson broke it himself the next week in the Seaton-Hillbury games, and this record, too, he broke the following year, and went on breaking records through four years of college life. But this is no part of the story I am trying to tell.

CHAPTER XVII

NEW YORK AND VIRGINIA

In the boisterous ending of the sports, Dick found himself momentarily alone. Curtis and Marks and Todd and the rest of his attending classmates were escorting Dickinson to the dressing quarters, halloing their joy at the glorious triumph by the way. Dick was too weary and sore to run after them, too deeply content with the outcome of things to care to seek the society of others. He lingered there quietly in his seat, simply enjoying the luxury of rest, until Martin's voice interrupted his meditation.

The senior approached, pushing before him a reluctant, struggling Philip.

"Here's this charge of yours, Dick, running off with another infant, and forgetting to give you his congratulations. It was all I could do to persuade him to come back."

"He didn't try to persuade me," retorted Phil, indignant at the affront. "He just grabbed me and pulled me right along with him, as he had no right at all to do. And I didn't forget, either; I thought you'd be so surrounded that I couldn't get at you."

"You see I'm not," returned Dick, pulling the little fellow down on the seat beside him. "And you'll have to forgive Martin this afternoon. He's feeling pretty sore. I don't believe he wanted to face me alone."

Martin gave a little, shamefaced laugh, which showed that the chance shot had hit the mark.

"You've beaten us handsomely, I own, and earned every victory. The half was really all we deserved, for the hundred, of course, was wholly a matter of luck. That was a sandy mile you put up, Dick. I never saw a better one. Considering the strain and the nerve required, it was really the most creditable thing of the day."

"Thank you," replied Dick; "but what about the quarter and the two-twenty?"

On the senior's face appeared a mixed expression of disgust and admiration. "He makes me tired, that man! I half expected you to win, for it's just like you to set your teeth and lash yourself to the front as you did. But who could have anticipated that a quiet, bookish fellow like that Dickinson would turn out such a wonder? It's no credit to him that he won. He can't help running any more than an antelope. Put him in prison and feed him on bread and water for ten years, and he'll beat half the sprinters as soon as he's let out. Such a fellow ought to be barred!"

"When are you going around the square with that cart?" asked Phil, with a roguish smile.

"After supper, sonny," replied Martin. "I'm on the way now to make arrangements."

The public interest in the wager made its fulfilment a public event. To the great relief of Curtis, who was looking forward to the hand-cart with suspicion, Martin found somewhere a racing sulky in which the big foot-ball player took his seat with glee, while Martin manfully grasped the shafts. The middle class fell in behind, dragging Dickinson and Melvin in a barouche, and this triumphant procession noisily encircled the square. The seniors gathered in knots at the corners and threw jests at both horse and driver. Curtis answered with his broadest grins and gayest words, but Martin, throughout the whole distance, stalked unmoved with the solemn dignity of an Indian chief at the council fire. The incident had the usual short life in the memory of the school, but the offended pride of the senior class did not so quickly slumber.

The school sports were but preliminary to the Seaton-Hillbury contest on the following Saturday. If Dickinson fancied that he was to be allowed to slip quietly back to his books after his great achievements, he was much mistaken. Nothing short of smallpox or a broken leg would have been accepted by the school as an excuse for failure to win points for Seaton in these dual games. The class hero was a school hero now, and with this brilliant new champion to follow, the school looked forward to the contest with rosy confidence. Dick, too, to his sincere grief, found himself as hopelessly entangled, for his sanguine schoolmates, when they cast the horoscope for the approaching event, unhesitatingly credited him with first place in the mile, and would hear no protests.

To tell the story of that second Saturday, when Dickinson continued his career of record smashing, would be too much like a repetition of our last chapter. It is enough to say that the Seaton star was easily first in the two-twenty and the quarter, and finished close at Travers's elbow when that unlucky sprinter at last succeeded in winning the hundred. Poor Dick found that there is a limit to what mere steadiness and grit can accomplish in the mile, and had to content himself with second place. But 'old John' came to the rescue grandly with two firsts in the hammer and shot, while Richardson and Morris contributed firsts in the high jump and half-mile. These, with Hartley's seconds in the two-twenty and broad jump, gave the Seatonians a safe though small margin and sent them home hilarious.

On the way Dick made a silent, stern vow that come what might, nothing should ever induce him to take part in a mile race again. A cruel strain at best, severe even upon a mature and rugged man, for the boy with muscles just hardening and heart and lungs still weighted with the burden of growth, it is both foolish and dangerous.

"Well, Dickinson," said Curtis, a few days later, as he and Melvin sat in the runner's room, "what do you think of it all? Was it worth while or not?"

Dickinson's eye rested lovingly on the bright new medals adorning his mantelpiece, at which only that noon he had found a small Prep gazing awestruck through the open door. It was not these precious things, however, that filled his heart as he sought for an answer to his classmate's question, but the recollection of the cordial looks and words of schoolmates poured upon him during these last days, the joy of being no longer an outsider to the school life.

"Yes," he said slowly, "it has paid. I have lost nothing and gained much. I owe a good deal to you fellows."

"We're not through with you, yet," said Curtis. "It's all very well, this winning medals and breaking records and glorifying yourself, but there's something of much greater consequence than that, in which you've got to help us."

"What?" cried the wondering Dickinson.

"Foot-ball," replied Curtis. "We must get some speed into the team. You are long, but there's meat on you and you're strong. We want you."

"Why, I've never played!"

"Don't you suppose I know that?" retorted John. "That's no obstacle or I shouldn't be asking you now, and Dick here wouldn't have made the team this year. All I want is your promise to try and try hard. Will you or won't you?"

Dickinson was tempted. When one has once tasted the joys of popularity, it is hard to resist the seductions of such an invitation. "It takes so much time," he said reluctantly, as visions of new laurels began to dance before him, "and I can't afford to neglect my studies."

"Neither can I," said Dick, promptly, "and what is more I'm not going to. If I can do both, you certainly can."

"Yes or no," said John, emphatically. "Can we count on you or not? It's a forlorn hope we are leading, and we want a support that we can trust. Are you with us or not?"

Then suddenly Dickinson put out his hand. "Yes, if you want me and I can help. Studies first, and foot-ball after, is all the condition I make."

"He may not be worth shucks," said John, as the pair of cronies emerged on the Carter steps. "You never can tell about such fellows."

"We've got him, anyway," replied Dick.

That evening, as Phil and his mentor were digging away on the usual tasks, Martin appeared with his spectacles on his nose and a forefinger between the leaves of a book.

"Going to get that hurricane classmate of yours to play foot-ball?"

"Yes!" replied Dick.

"I don't believe he'll do it."

"He's agreed to."

"He'd better not. It isn't safe to risk a reputation like his on a new game, to say nothing of his legs. Good evening, Philip."

"Good evening," replied Philip, cautiously.

"I've just been reading about Virginia in this history — Fiske's 'Old Virginia.' It's an authority and a very interesting book. Has your family been long in the state?"

"It is one of the oldest there," replied Philip, proudly. "Our ancestors were among the first settlers."

"Come over voluntarily or sent over?"

"What do you mean?"

"Why, don't you know that the early settlers in Virginia were largely paupers and convicts transported from England? I suppose they don't teach that in the schools down there."

If there was one historical notion especially impressed on Philip's mind, it was that Virginia, whatever her position among the states to-day, had been in the past the real founder of the nation, the possessor of the one undisputed aristocracy, the mother of a long series of great men from Washington to Robert E. Lee. He saw the past history of his native state through a veil of romance which made of every gentleman a noble cavalier and every planter's house a lordly manor. To have this dreadful accusation flung at his royal Virginia with such an air of confidence fairly took his breath away. He knew not what to say or think.

"Let me read you something here," pursued Martin, omitting whatever did not suit his purpose: "'The aristocracy of Virginia was recruited from the ranks of these paupers and convicts,'—and farther over, quoting an early English writer,—'even your transported felons sent to Virginia, instead of Tyburn—thousands of them—have become rich, substantial planters and merchants, magistrates, captains of good ships, masters of good estates.' 'Dr. Johnson,'—he was the great dictionary man, you know,—'in 1769, declared them a race of convicts, and Defoe in one of his novels made one of his characters say: "Here many a Newgate bird becomes a great man. There's Mayor ——, he was an eminent pickpocket; there's Justice B., he was a shoplifter."' If this is true, Phil, it seems to me that ancestry in Virginia isn't much to boast of."

This long speech ended, Martin stood leaning against the table, watching with amusement the little Virginian, who was staring up at him with a shocked, hurt expression on his face. The blow had struck with a force quite unexpected. To the boy's untrained, credulous mind, the brave show of great names carried a ponderous authority.

"I — I don't believe it," he stammered.

"Neither do I," added Melvin, snatching the volume from Martin's hand. "Let's see what the author really says."

The book was beyond his reach before Martin meant to let it go, but he made no effort to regain it.

"Read it yourself if you want to."

"Why, you've omitted the chief thing!" exclaimed Dick, after a hasty study of the page. "Fiske quotes all this only to disprove it. You're misrepresenting."

"I think he's wrong," replied Martin, coolly; "I hold to the other view myself."

Philip leaped to his feet, his cheeks suddenly blanched. His fright had passed away, leaving him in a fury of indignation that choked and shook him like an evil spirit.

"Liar!" he hissed into the senior's face, "always lying, contemptible scoundrel! How I would thrash you if I were big enough!" And with this the boy seized his books and fled to his own room.

Martin remained silently gazing at the door, his features twisted into an uncomfortable smile. It was Dick who spoke first.

"I give you warning, Martin, that this is the last time this thing is to occur. That boy is under my care, and it's simply treachery in me to expose him to such bullying."

"I didn't think he'd take it so hard," replied the senior, regretfully; "I only meant to have a little sport with him. He's such a regular little rebel powder-magazine that it's an awful temptation to explode him. Besides, he oughtn't to be so infernally sensitive. He can't go through life ready to challenge anybody who says Jeff Davis was caught in petticoats. Why don't you teach him to prove wrong ideas to be wrong, and not to fight the man who holds them?"

"He'll learn that in time. Your method of teaching is certainly not likely to improve him."

"I wouldn't hurt the lad for the world," replied Martin, seriously, "but he *is* tempting."

Next day the senior met Philip in the street and stopped to apologize. The boy would not listen. From that time on he cut the older student's acquaintance. If Martin entered Dick's room while Phil was there, the boy left it immediately. If they approached each other on the street, Philip crossed to the other side. So sullen Virginia held New York at bay.

CHAPTER XVIII

CLASS FRICTION

It was shortly after this that the senior dinner serenade occurred. That Dick took no part in this was not entirely due to his determination to keep out of mischief. The thing was gotten up on the spur of the moment on a Saturday afternoon when Dick and Phil had gone on a trolley ride to the seashore, and all the fun was over before their return. It would be hardly safe to say that Dick would have kept out of it if he had been at home, for the plan seemed innocent enough, and the execution free from danger. It was the consequences that were fatal, and these no boy would have foreseen.

The seniors were dining at the Piscataqua, the chief hotel in the place, where of old the upper classes had been allowed to hold their annual banquets. The dining room lay at the rear of the house, looking upon a yard nearly enclosed by barns and outbuildings. It would be a fine lark, the middlers thought, to muster in this yard with noise-making instruments and suddenly break in upon the after-dinner oratory with unexpected table music. The instruments were easily gathered — tin pans, horns, bull fiddles, screech owls, cannon crackers. A watch was placed on a convenient shed that commanded a good view of the president's chair, to give the signal when the proper time came. The president rose for the business of the evening, worked his stammering way through his introduction, and having finally stifled the throbbings of his heart and tamed somewhat his quaking voice, was just starting on the grander portion of his eulogy, when *slap! toot bang* — his speech was fairly drowned in a terrific and unwelcome applause.

The seniors pulled down the window-shades and deliberated. Some wished to sally forth and remove the celebrants by force. The wiser heads objected to this and advised patience. But patience is not easy to a boy smarting under injustice, and as the minutes slipped by and the din continued as wild as ever, there seemed real danger of an ugly encounter. At this juncture Martin whispered something in the president's ear, and then slipped out, returning a few minutes later with an air of victory. Presently the concert wavered and broke and died away into a discouraged screech like a steam whistle when the steam gives out, and then the sound of scampering feet gave welcome assurance that the rioters had fled. The report that Professor M., who lived not far away, was coming with a policeman had spread consternation through the ranks.

Next day there was an exchange of compliments; each class claimed a victory, the middlers in having broken in on the dinner, the seniors in outwitting the middlers. But the incident certainly rankled in the upper classmen's minds.

"A pretty poor trick," said Martin, as he sat after dinner in Dick's room. "I should have thought you capable of something cleverer."

"I hadn't anything to do with it," was the reply on the middler's lips. He suppressed it, however, from some vague fear of being disloyal, and contented himself with answering: —

"It worked, anyway."

"Only partially," retorted Martin. "To be successful it ought to have been kept up. Your sand gave out at the first suggestion of danger, and then you stampeded like a herd of cattle."

Melvin thought it time to change the subject.

"Who is president of your class, anyway?"

"Thomas," answered Martin. "Who is yours?"

"I have that honor," said Dick, smiling.

"A doubtful honor," sniffed Martin. "When do the calves feed?"

"I don't think I understand you," replied Melvin, coldly.

"Well, then, if you must have it in classical English, when does your class have its dinner?"

"Some time next week."

"I suppose you'll go to the same old place," said the visitor, with an air of indifference. "Old Marlow at the Piscataqua does pretty well by you, after all."

"I don't think it's been decided yet," replied Dick, and Martin went home.

After this conversation, Dick thought long and hard. The seniors were evidently more chagrined than Martin admitted, over the interruption of their feast. They would probably attempt a reprisal when the middlers held their own dinner. In fact, Martin's questions showed plainly that he had some such thing in view. If this was probable, it was equally probable that whatever scheme Martin set his heart on, would certainly be attempted, however desperate it might be. With Martin on the war-path and the two classes dragged into conflict, there would be no end of complications and evil consequences. To give up the middlers' dinner would mean derision and accusations of cowardice and bad blood; to hold it was to court disaster. Here were Scylla and Charybdis, indeed.

Phil came in with his thoughts on the trip of the day before. "What fun we had, Dick! Next time let's get away earlier and cook our dinner on the rocks."

"We could get something to eat at the houses down there, I suppose," said Dick, absent-mindedly.

"They didn't look very inviting," answered Philip. "Most of them were closed, and the rest seemed to have nothing on their signs but fish-chowder and tonic."

"There's a good hotel farther back in

the village, but it's three miles from the sea; we passed it on the way down. It's called the 'Lafayette.'"

Dick's mind dwelt only partially on his words as he uttered them, but with the words, the thought of a greater possibility flashed suddenly upon him: Wouldn't Grim, under the circumstances, let the middlers dine at the Lafayette?

For two or three days Melvin kept his scheme to himself and quietly watched developments. What he had anticipated came to pass. The seniors shifted from questions to hints, and from hints to threats. The class were now discussing the prospect openly. It seemed time to act.

First he visited the Principal, explained the situation, and outlined his plan.

"It will be a bad precedent," said Mr. Graham.

"But it will save trouble," pleaded Dick. "We can arrange it so that our destination shall not be known until the last moment."

Mr. Graham smiled. "You'll find that difficult; nevertheless, I am willing to try you. You must promise to keep within the regular hours, and be subject to all the rules usually followed. I will write to the landlord of the Lafayette myself."

The next day Melvin called a meeting of the class, and asked for a committee of three to arrange the dinner. Without announcing his plan, he proposed that the arrangement be made in secret, and that the committee be given full power to act for the class. The proposition was accepted, and Melvin, Curtis, and Wilkinson were chosen to the committee.

The three swore secrecy and went to work. They succeeded in making an agreement with the Lafayette without betraying themselves. Marlow, in Seaton, was cautioned not to deny that he was tc entertain the class, and other local arrangements were openly suggested as possible. As the committee kept their own counsel, and the members of the class were as ignorant and curious as the rest of the school, the problem immediately became a matter of enormous interest for the whole student body. The curiosity grew from day to day. By Wednesday, the day of the dinner, the excitement was like that of the crowd in a large city awaiting presidential returns.

In the morning Dick had made arrangements for the two extras, which were to start immediately after the regular car and carry the diners. The superintendent promised secrecy, and honestly tried to carry out his promise. But at noon, as two motormen stood talking before the car station, one remarked: —

"There's two extras down for 6:30."

"What for?" asked his companion.

"Don't know, and don't care, neither. I shan't have to run 'em."

But some one else did care; it was the senior who happened to be passing by, and overheard the remark.

Two extras at 6:30! Could it be for

the middlers' dinner?—and he was off to Martin's room.

A little after two, Martin met John Curtis on the street—very casually, it seemed—and grasped him suddenly and violently by the collar. "We've got your secret at last," he cried, eying the middler sharply; "going to the Lafayette—two cars to leave at half-past six!"

"Who told you?" gasped John.

"Oh, we've found out all about it," answered Martin, delighted that his guess had struck so near.

"I'd like to know how!" blundered Curtis, and then, as the teasing expression came into Martin's face, he saw he had betrayed himself and turned roughly away.

"You don't know anything about it."

The news ran like wildfire. Melvin and Wilkinson were attacked singly, with the report that Curtis had let it all out. Each added his confirmation before he realized what he was doing.

The secret was a secret no longer.

CHAPTER XIX

THE CLASS EARNS ITS DINNER

"How everlastingly stupid of you, John!" exclaimed Wilkinson, as the committee got together, "to snap at the bait like that. You just gave the whole thing away."

Curtis, who was feeling rather blue, but not too blue for a fight, retorted hotly: "It was you fellows who gave the thing away. I told them nothing."

"They just bluffed you, and when you gasped and stammered, they knew they were right. Of course we couldn't help acknowledging the thing when they said you had told them."

"Well, it's done and can't be undone," said Dick. "We're all to blame, and we must all share the responsibility. The question now is, What shall we do?"

"You'd better look out, or they'll kidnap you," said John. "It's the first thing they'd think of."

"It won't make any difference if they do," replied Melvin; "for the vice-president is going down this afternoon to be ready for any emergency. I don't see what they can do, anyway; all the plans are made."

"You might slip into some teacher's house for the rest of the day," said Wilkinson.

"That would be a glorious way of meeting them, wouldn't it?" snapped John. "Hide behind the faculty! I'd rather be kidnapped."

"So would I," said Dick. "It's much better to run our chances. You two see that the fellows get together promptly, and I'll keep out of the way until the car goes."

Dick went to the library to work, thinking himself safer there, and at last succeeded in getting interested in his books. It was nearly six when he started home to dress for the evening. The streets were as quiet as usual. No seniors were about, and there was no sign of danger. He felt ashamed of his fears.

The class gathered hilariously expectant, and trooped to the cars with a brave front, determined to brook no interference; but there was none to brook. The handful of seniors, who appeared on the sidewalk as they started, came merely out of curiosity, and actually gave them a cheer on their way. The special cars fell in behind the regular, and the class was soon bumping along outside the town at full speed toward the Lafayette.

Three miles from the town the track leaves the highway and makes a short cut through the woods, meeting the road again half a mile below. It is a favorite stretch for the summer visitors, for the sudden transition from the open, dusty road to the cool retirement of the thick woods refreshes like a sea-turn on a sultry August day. In the middle of this stretch, where the trees stand the closest and the track dips into the hollow of the basin, the cars came to a sudden stop, blocked by the regular ahead. In a moment the students were swarming forward to see what was the matter.

There was no need to ask questions — the obstacle was but too evident. A huge pile of stumps, tree trunks, stones, and earth was piled upon the road-bed. On one side the rails were torn up for several lengths; on the other they were intact, left apparently to keep the electric connections. The mass of the barricade was appalling; the road seemed blocked for twenty-four hours.

The first impression of the boys, as they gathered gleefully about the mound, was that the whole thing was very funny. In a moment, however, when they began to think of the dinner which was waiting and spoiling, and would probably never be eaten, their views rapidly changed. The other passengers had been in no such uncertainty. The women were indignant, the men furious, the railroad hands alternately cursing and wondering what to do.

"There's a limit to these student pranks," shouted an old gentleman angrily, as Dick and his committee approached the group of railroad men. "It's a criminal offence to block a United States Mail road."

"But we didn't do it," said Wilkinson; "we are as anxious to go on as you are."

"Some of your friends did it, then; it amounts to the same thing. These boys have run over the town so long they think they can tackle the United States government. They'll find they're sadly mistaken."

"Can't we do anything to help?" asked Dick, as he got near the railroad men. "We're terribly anxious to get through."

"You won't get through to-night; I can tell you that right here," said one of the men. They, too, held the students as a body responsible.

"Aren't you going to do anything at all?"

"What can we do?" retorted the motorman, savagely. "Some one has got to walk to the power-house where the up-car is waiting for us this minute, and have a gang of men sent up. It's a mile and a half down there, and it'll be dark before they can get here."

"Isn't there a telephone near by?"

"There's one back at the last turnout — that's farther still."

"A mile and a half!" mused Dick. "I think we can get word there in about ten minutes."

The man laughed. "You'll have to fly then, or steal a horse."

"Mason! Harry Mason! Oh, Harry Mason!" shouted Dick. "Where's Mason?"

"Here I am," replied Mason, pushing in through the crowd.

"Here, Harry, here's a stunt for you. How quickly can you go down the road to the power-house — a mile and a half?"

"In about ten minutes — or in these clothes perhaps eleven," replied Harry.

"Will you take a message down there for

us? If you can, I believe you will save us the dinner. It's nothing to a hare and hounds man like you! I'd do it myself if I weren't booked to preside."

"Certainly," said Mason, unbuttoning his coat. "What shall I say?"

The railroad men began to wake up. "We want a gang of men and a couple of track-layers with tools, right off," said the conductor of the regular.

"No, no! that would waste time," said Dick, "just the track-layers with tools and an extra car."

"But this heap of stuff that's got to come off?"

"We'll attend to that," answered Dick.

By this time Mason had stripped to undershirt and trousers, and stood with a jersey on his arm, ready to start.

"Hurry, then, for all you are worth," Dick whispered in his ear; "and promise them an extra dollar or two if necessary."

A peculiar silence held the crowd as they watched the runner speeding away over the rough track. They had seen many races before, but never one like this. Here was no contest and no prize, and yet Mason was running for the glory of the class quite as truly as when he won the school cup in the two-mile run the year before.

The voice of John Curtis, speaking from the car platform, recalled their attention.

"While we're waiting for Mason, we've got our job cut out for us. Those fellows must have built that pile since the last car went up — that is in less than half an hour. What they put up in that time we can take down in less. Who's willing to take off his coat and help save the dinner?"

"I!" "I!" "I!" The enthusiasm was immediate. Off came the good coats and vests and white shirts, and like ants the throng swarmed over the pile, pushing, pulling, prying, rolling, getting into each other's way, but laughing and shouting and scattering the rubbish like a frame-house before a cyclone. The railroad men looked on with amazement, as the heap diminished and the road-bed came gradually back to view.

A motorman pinched Dick's arm. "The rails!" Dick uttered an exclamation of despair. For a moment it seemed as if the seniors' audacious scheme was really to be triumphant,—as if the dinner must really be given up. It would soon be dark; it was already dusk in the woods. Then he jumped to John Curtis's place on the car platform.

"There are three rails gone!" he shouted. "The rascals have hidden them somewhere. We must scatter and find them. Search every inch of ground!"

The boys understood and acted. Some ran along the track, others beat the ground on either side. Soon a shout came from the woods on the left, and the exultant discoverers came running with the news. While the rails were being brought, some one also came across the spikes and plates in the ditch.

The boys were now thoroughly aroused. Tom Wilkinson mounted the platform. "Sherman's army is nothing compared to us; let's lay the rails and go on ourselves, without waiting for Harry!"

Dick began to see danger ahead. It was much easier to stir the crowd up than to keep them within reasonable bounds. His fears proved groundless, however; for while the would-be track-layers were looking for something with which to drive the spikes, the boys on the outskirts heard the familiar hum of the car motor and the screech of the wheels against the rails, and around the curve into the woods came the car, with Mason on the front seat wrapped in his jersey, grinning from ear to ear. He had covered the distance in nine minutes and a half, and found time, while the car was getting out, to telephone orders to the Lafayette to delay the dinner half an hour.

There never was a dinner so enjoyed by a class as that at the Lafayette. Every one was hungry, every one was happy, and every one felt that he had contributed to the victory; while the class glory was so obvious that no one questioned the most exaggerated phrase of the most reckless orator or prophet.

CHAPTER XX

JOHN IS SURPRISED

If only the incident could have ended here! But it was not to be. While the joy at the Lafayette was at its height, Mr. Graham sat closeted with the enraged superintendent of the railroad in a long and trying session. It was an act of insolence beyond endurance, the superintendent declared. Interference with a mail-route was a criminal offence, subject to a severe penalty; he should give the proper officers all the help he could to bring the offenders to punishment. Mr. Graham argued, and the superintendent became more violent; he pleaded for consideration for the thoughtlessness of the boys, and the superintendent hardened his heart; he sought to arouse some sympathy for himself and the officers of the school under their difficult responsibilities; the superintendent cared neither for Principal nor for school. Finally Mr. Graham bethought him of the president of the railroad, an old Seaton graduate whom he had met at the last alumni dinner, and this name had some conjuring force. The railroad man hesitated, deliberated, and finally agreed to postpone action until he had heard from the president.

The reporters were next to be seen. They were already at work on their reports for the city papers. The Principal besought them, if they did not wish to destroy the reputation of the school, to smother the story entirely.

"It means a loss of from ten to twenty dollars apiece," said one.

"I will see that you lose nothing," promptly replied Mr. Graham.

"If the papers get on to it, they'll send some one else to write it up, and perhaps take our jobs away from us."

"I only ask for time in which to see the editors," said the Principal. "You can surely give me twenty-four hours in the interest of both town and school."

The reporters yielded, and the immediate danger was over.

Next morning Professor Anthony conducted prayers. Grim had gone to the city, the rumor ran, and the boys connected his absence with the escapade of the night before, and speculated and wondered. The middlers were swaggering about in triumph; the seniors claimed ignorance as to the whole affair. The school atmosphere was heavy with suppressed excitement; some storm was surely coming.

The second morning found the Principal in his accustomed seat in chapel, but with a face solemn and careworn. As he rose to speak after the usual exercises were over, a hush of anxious expectancy fell on the gathering, and every eye was riveted on the stern face that looked out over the benches. Briefly and clearly Mr. Graham reviewed the great event. He dwelt on the folly of the act, on the wicked disregard of public rights which it involved, on the liability of the authors to criminal punishment, and on the treacherous and dangerous wounds that they were giving to the reputation of the school. Then he related his interviews with the superintendent and the reporters, and described his long and discouraging struggle at the newspaper offices the day before, when every influential alumnus within reach had to be drawn upon to keep the pernicious story out of print. "And now, gentlemen," he concluded, "I have, perhaps, effected a compromise with the railroad. I have possibly succeeded in imposing silence on the newspapers. With this, however, I am at the end of my resources. I can neither ferret out the guilty, nor put honor into hearts which know no honor. I stand helpless before you. Upon you, and not me, depend the character and reputation of the school. It is for you to say what we shall do now."

Dick drew a deep breath as the Principal came to a stop, and instinctively turned around toward the senior section. The class sat in perfect silence, like a criminal dumbstruck by the sentence just pronounced against him. Suddenly the stillness was broken by the noise of some one rising to his feet. It was Martin.

"I want to say, Mr. Graham, that I am chiefly responsible for the plan of blocking the cars."

Dick could hardly believe his ears. Was this the treacherous old Martin, thus openly declaring himself guilty?

Behind him Ferguson was on his feet.

"I was also concerned in it."

And then another started, and another, and another, until fifteen were standing.

"The school may pass out. I wish to see these fifteen," said Mr. Graham.

The students filed out soberly, awed by what had happened. Dick went by the rear aisle and gave Martin an encouraging word as he passed by. Curtis was waiting for him outside, his big face over-spread with a peculiarly puzzled expression. "That's the first time I ever saw open confession in this school. I call that pretty slick. And Martin of all men! It beats me!"

"It was great," said Dick. "I believe Grim's happy enough to hug them."

"Hug nothing!" answered John. "He has no more heart than a shark. If he's happy, it's because he got them so easy. He'll fire them all to-morrow — see if he doesn't!"

The fifteen were immediately suspended. Their ultimate fate was to be decided at a Faculty meeting on the following day. By noon, on the day of the confession, copies of a petition for leniency were flying around the school, headed by the middlers, and diligently forwarded by every one to whom the privilege fell. The eight seniors who were known to have been concerned in the barricade, but had not the courage to own it, were the only boys in school whose names did not appear on the list. No one would offer them the petition.

The Faculty meeting was a strenuous one. The boys hovered about the building while the momentous question was being weighed, wondering what caused the delay, imagining the views of different teachers, and guessing on the result. No one ever learned exactly what passed within the Faculty room, but next day every boy agreed that it was Grim and Professor Anthony who fought the boys' case to the end, and finally triumphed. The fifteen were put on strict probation for the rest of the year.

Scarcely had the school recovered from the sobering effect of this experience, when the Hillbury base-ball game brought fresh mortification. They were beaten again. To lose one game in the year was bad enough; the loss of both was deeply humiliating. The track victory seemed as nothing in view of this twofold defeat. Despondency settled down upon the school like a black cloud. Curtis and Melvin consoled each other with hopes for the foot-ball.

"Only the more glory for us in the fall," said Curtis; "we'll even things up, then." But the school continued to mourn, until the closing exercises of the year and the final cram for college examinations drove less important things from their minds.

CHAPTER XXI

DOWN THE RIVER

In one boy's eyes, Martin won nothing by his confession. Philip persisted in regarding him in the light of a dangerous criminal, whose occasional repentance is but a convenient device to gain opportunities for further law-breaking. Martin's offences had been many and heinous; his repentance but once and under great stress. Phil distrusted him and feared him, and, despite the entire cessation of persecution and Martin's evident desire to be friendly again, continued obstinately to avoid all association with him.

"I'm sorry you are so bitter against Martin, Philip," said Dick. "It isn't right to hate a person so."

It was the last Saturday of the term.

They had just met Martin on the way to his nine o'clock recitation, and Phil had declined to recognize him.

"I don't hate him," replied the boy. "I just despise him for a liar and a coward. He'd serve me another mean trick to-morrow if he could, and I won't give him a chance."

"I don't think he's as bad as that," said Melvin, gently, for he knew he was on delicate ground. "Martin has bad qualities enough, of course, but he has good ones, too, and now that he knows you are really sensitive about certain things, he will avoid them."

"I'm *not* sensitive," cried Phil, with the tears in his eyes, "that is, not when things are true; but I'm not bound to associate with liars, and I shan't."

A little later Phil appeared with face radiant.

"There's a schooner going down the river at half-past twelve, Dick, and Mr. Henderson has asked me to go down on it as far as Rivermouth. It will be great! We can come back by train, you know."

"Will he take me, too?"

"Of course! Any one may go that wants to. It's the regular custom here for people to go down on the coal vessels. You go ever so far — through the river and across the bay, and into other rivers and under bridges, and finally through Rivermouth Harbor out to sea."

"You seem to know a lot about it," said Dick, smiling. "Of course I'll go."

In years long past, when produce was brought in great ox sleds from a hundred miles "up country," and exchanged at tide-water for products of other states and imports from foreign lands, Seaton had had its share of the petty commerce of the day. Ships were built below the falls and floated down to be fitted out at the great port below. Smaller vessels worked their slow way up-stream with the flow of the tide, moving the freight while the stage-coach carried the people. Seaton throve in those days with the other towns lying on the tributaries of the bay that reaches, like a hand with fingers outstretched, deep into the heart of the land. Then came the War of 1812, paralyzing the trade of the coast; and what survived the ravages of war yielded before the conquering advance of railroad and steamship. Inland products found cheaper routes to the few great centres, small vessels were crowded out of trade, and Seaton, like a hundred other minor ports, was thrown back upon its own resources. Its deserted wharves rotted away; a pine forest grew over the shipyards; factories sprang up to preserve and even augment the business life of the town, but the romance of the sea had departed forever.

So, if Philip did not "know a lot" about the port of Seaton, it was really because there was not much to know. He had not been indifferent to the attractions of the lower river. Early in his school career he had made the acquaintance of Mr. Henderson, at whose wharf the little schooners delivered their sooty cargoes from the coal ports, and then, in default of a load of wood or a cargo of leather scraps from the factory, sailed light to the Kennebec for ice. These were the only survivors of the historic traders of the river, as the single sturdy coal-barge, whose oaken frame seasoning on the stocks had been for a twelvemonth an absorbing attraction for the townspeople, was the only example of local shipbuilding since the early thirties. These little coasters were a source of great interest to Phil. In some way or other — perhaps through his taking Southern drawl or the openness of his big, honest eyes — he had won the favor of Mr. Henderson, and, with the friendly connivance of the proprietor of the yard, had made personal investigation of various vessels from keelson to topmast. He had learned what the trim little captain's cabin usually contained, how the rusty galley stove was used, how the hands bunked in the forecastle, how the cargo was stowed in the hold. And the more he saw, the more eager he became to feel the craft move under his feet, and see in practical working the parts of the vessel which he had come to know so well in port.

So it happened that Phil felt especially lively as they boarded the *Mary Frazer* about noon. There were a half-dozen students already on board, and the boy's ecstasy was somewhat dampened at the sight of his old enemy among them. The discouragement did not last long, however, for the deck was obviously big enough for all, and he was by no means restricted to Martin's society.

The fastenings were cast off and the little towboat gave a jerk at the line.

"Why, the tide hasn't turned yet," said Phil, looking over the side.

"That's true," answered Mr. Henderson, who stood by the man at the wheel; "we like to start before the tide, so as to take the first bridges at slack water."

The schooner glided along with the steady, easy motion of a canal-boat. The familiar buildings of the village drew slowly away behind them. They floated past green fields guarded by great square farmhouses, and rocky pastures where the young pines were selfishly crowding back the grass, and little inlets lined with reeds and thick woods running up the bank from the water's edge. Soon they were passing through the midst of a little village, where the deserted mill and heaps of rusty iron at the riverside told the tale of a perished industry — a tale repeated in many a decayed New England town. The towboat whistled for a draw, and a few minutes later they swept straight between the piers of an ancient toll-bridge.

"You see we couldn't do this so well if the tide were running strong," said Mr. Henderson, turning to the boy. "The bridges are the problems on this trip."

And Phil, happy to have got an answer to a question which he did not like to ask, roamed forward to watch the water swish against the vessel's stem.

They were now in the open bay, which spread out before them like a lake rimmed with green slopes. The schooner slipped indolently along over the smooth surface without shock or quiver, as if adrift. The older boys gathered at the stern, where Martin was already on easy terms with the captain, a tall, haggard, round-shouldered man, who knew much of the misery and little of the romance of the sea. Phil hung for a time about the three-cornered platform at the bow, — he spoke of it with satisfaction as the "to'gallant fo'castle," — where were the capstan and the windlass and the anchor, and the bitts to which the tow-line was made fast — all parts of the schooner which seemed to him to savor most of the vessel's sea-going strength. Then he climbed the shrouds to the masthead, where he had been before while the *Mary Frazer* was fast at the wharf. And when called down from here by Dick's urgent summons, reënforced by a warning from the captain, he came aft to nest in the slack of the lowered mainsail as it hung between gaff and boom over the top of the cabin. Here at least he was safe, and Dick could give his attention once more to the talk of the group about the wheel.

Good-natured as he was, the captain was proving a reluctant story-teller. The incidents in a sailor's career, most attractive to the idle listener, are often too closely connected with desperate and bitter experiences to be pleasant topics for the man of whose life-history they have formed a part. So Captain Hanks, though evidently well disposed toward his temporary passengers, and quite willing to contribute little incidents and scraps of sea adventure to the general conversation, yet steered clear of the more tragic tales of his repertoire. Finally, Mr. Henderson, in the vain hope of drawing him out, ventured to ask:—

"Don't you want to tell them of your

experiences off Norfolk that winter when you were in the *Susan B.?*"

The captain's confidential mood vanished suddenly with the smile upon his lips.

"Not to-day," he said abruptly. "I ain't got time. We'll be at Dedham Point pretty soon."

The shores of the bay were now drawing together into that narrower, deeper stretch known as Little Bay. The quiet lake had become a broad river whose sweeping current, fed by the ebb of the tidal basin behind, poured in great circling eddies toward the sea. As they rounded a sharp bend and the long railroad bridge appeared half a mile below, a sudden gust from the southeast struck them sharply in the face. The towboat dropped back and made fast alongside, and then, as boat and tow swept together down-stream, the boat captain leaned out of his little pilot-house and shouted over to the schooner's master: —

"Goin' out, or will you anchor in the lower harbor?"

"I guess I'll go out," returned Captain Hanks; "looks as if they'd be a fair wind and enough of it."

"They'll be a stiff breeze, to-night, all right."

They were rapidly approaching the bridge, the draw of which was already swinging. Dick looked over the rail and watched the waters swirling along, deep and mighty and dangerous. "What a terrible tide!" he said, as he found Mr. Henderson by his side.

"About the worst on the coast," was the answer. "It runs six or seven knots under that bridge. The pilot of a little tug like this has to have some skill to put a schooner through here safely. He has to drop us through, stern foremost."

Dick looked ahead. The draw was open, and the waters were racing like mad through the open stretch on either side of the long pier, which projected up-stream. The tide, he could plainly see, ran somewhat diagonally with the bridge. The schooner and towboat were now drifting side on toward the pier, the engine starting and stopping and backing in what seemed to Dick an inexplicable agitation.

"The tide sets down to the right, the eddy up on the left," said Mr. Henderson. "The eddy carries the bow up, the tide swings us around, and the boat lets us down easily against the pier where we can make fast and go through as we please. Just see how neatly it is done!"

He had hardly spoken when the wind suddenly stiffened into a tremendous blast and struck the vessel hard, swinging her suddenly toward the pier and totally upsetting the nice calculations of the pilot.

"She's going to strike, and strike hard!" shouted Mr. Henderson, running to the rail near the stern and throwing over a fender. Dick was following with the feeling of stupid curiosity which possesses us in the midst of activities which we do not understand, when the thought of Phil suddenly stopped him. Where was the boy? He had not seen him for half an hour!

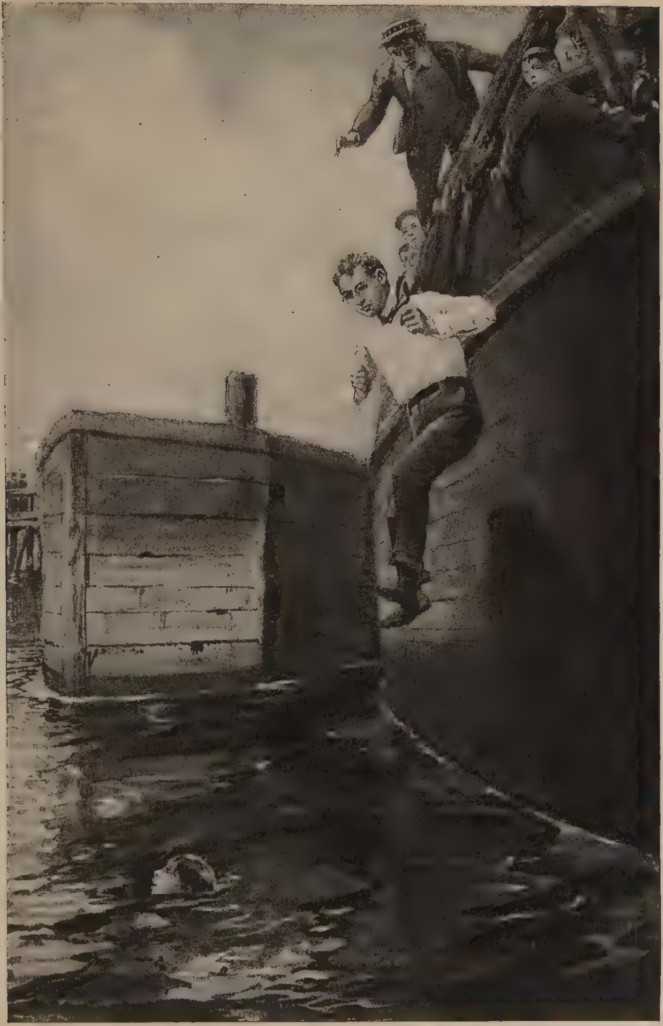
Quivering with anxiety, tortured by a horrible fear, he searched with frantic glances from stem to stern. Away out on the bowsprit, with his feet resting on the stays and clutching the jib-boom in his arms, stood the missing lad, gazing in fascination into the water beneath.

The vessel struck the pier well aft, with a shock that sent a shiver through her whole frame, and threw Dick violently off his balance. When he got his feet again, the figure on the bowsprit had disappeared!

In a flash Dick saw the situation in all its appalling hopelessness. The headlong current, boiling savagely down-stream, was sweeping the fallen lad straight for the angle between the slanting pier and the bumping, grinding vessel, where he must either be sucked beneath the schooner's keel or jammed between planks and piling. His only chance of escape would be to force his way across the current, so that when he reached the sharp pier end, which parted the rushing tide as a vessel's cutwater cleaves the sea waves, he might be carried through the open stretch beyond the pier, away from the dread angle — and this for an inexperienced swimmer, frightened by his fall and too confused to understand the conditions, was wholly impossible.

Dick comprehended the situation instantly, in a tithe of the time required for the briefest description of it, and with a vague notion of doing something, he knew not what, to save the boy, he leaped to the vessel's side. But though he thought quickly and acted quickly, some one else was quicker still. Martin had been for some time standing by the rail with an eye on the youngster, growing uneasy at the danger he was running. Feeling himself in disgrace, however, with both pupil and guardian, the senior hesitated to give a warning which, if needless, would be looked upon as a disagreeable obtrusion. So he watched the boy and waited, and while he waited, weighed the circumstances and the chances. When the shock came, he was ready to act at the very instant he saw the boy slip from the stays.

To throw off his coat and shoes, dash a few steps up the deck, mount the rail, was for Martin but the work of a moment. In an instant more he had seen the boy come gasping to the surface, seen the cruel waters sweep him against the vessel's planks, and roll him, stunned and choking, toward the fatal angle. Then, leaping into the water, the senior clutched the drifter and struck out furiously across the current. It was a short, hard, convulsive struggle, like the final desperate scrimmage on the goal-line, with a time limit inexorably fixed by the sweep of the merciless tide toward the slimy planking of the pier. In a few seconds it was over. Martin and Phil struck the pier exactly in the middle, hung an instant at the point as the dividing streams struggled for the prize, and then disappeared into the open stretch beyond.



Leaping into the water, the senior clutched the drifter
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In stupid, helpless horror Dick had watched the brief race. Now, as the swimmer and his burden passed from sight, he came to himself, and bethought him of the life-preserver attached to the side of the cabin. Cutting this loose, he jumped with it to the pier, darted along under the drawbridge, and cast it to the boys in the water.

The help came none too soon. Phil, it is true, had regained consciousness, and was doing his best to keep himself afloat. Martin, however, exhausted by his tremendous exertions, was feeling that he must soon come to the end of his strength. His friends were apparently out of reach. Beyond the bridge flowed the great river, swelled now by new tributaries, with the nearest bank rising over inhospitable waters far away. The life-preserver was true to its name; it brought support and encouragement when both were sorely needed. Resting on its buoyancy, the boys breathed again, and were content to paddle easily for the slack water at the side.

Meantime the drawtender had got out his dory and put after them. A hundred yards below he caught up with them and helped them into the boat. And then, while they paddled in the eddies, waiting for the vessel to pass the bridge and pick them up, he held forth to them in language emphatic, rather than polite, on the carelessness of boys 'round a vessel' and their narrow escape from death. For a time they were both too much subdued to reply. At last Phil, who felt himself deeply guilty, began to weep, and Martin was aroused.

"Here, take that and shut up," he said, fishing a soaked bill out of his pocket. "You make me want to jump in again."

On the vessel their reception was most cordial. The boys crowded about with offers of sweaters and coats, and while they glorified Martin, they petted Phil until he almost forgot that his carelessness had put two lives in jeopardy. The engineer of the towboat had them both down by the boiler fire, where they were so thoroughly steamed and baked that their clothes were half dry by the time they landed at the Rivermouth bridge, whence, swathed in borrowed clothing, they hurried for the station to catch the Seaton train. During the short journey Phil sat silent and thoughtful, but Martin, carried away by reaction of nerves and the adulation of his friends, was merrier than ever.

That was the end both of the enmity and of sectional disputes. Phil prepared himself to meet the senior's gibes with indulgent patience, but the unpleasant questions were not raised again. And when, a few days later, Phil said good-by to the town and school, leaving his older friends to struggle with the college examinations, he parted with Martin as if he had been the friend of a lifetime.

"Do you see that thing?" said the senior, coming into Dick's room after the commencement exercises, with a white roll tied with ribbon. "That's mine. It's a diploma regularly signed and approved. I really never expected to get it."

"And I never expected you would," replied Melvin. "To tell the truth, I don't think you deserve it."

"I don't know that I do," said Martin, gravely, "but I think I shall some day." And then they buckled down to work.

CHAPTER XXII

THE SUMMER VACATION

THERE are few moments in a boy's life more full of joy than those when, after his first long absence, he at last reaches the home he has so longed to see. If, in addition, he returns in some sense a conqueror, however insignificant the victory may have been, his delight is immeasurably increased. He has grown in height and strength, in courage, in self-respect, in independence. His father questions him about his work and his life at school, and marks with pride that his statements are clearer, his thought more mature, his whole bearing more manly. His mother listens with an admiring smile, delighted that he has grown better looking and takes better care of his person and his clothes, but shuddering at the stories of violent play, and perplexed at the strange ways of strange boys which the home-comer describes in such a matter-of-fact fashion. His old playmates greet him cordially, at first perhaps a little suspicious, as if they are not certain that his head may not have been turned by his new experiences. And as they find him the same boy they have always known, without pretence or conceit, simply a little older and less ignorant, they forgive him his absence and welcome him to his old place.

One of the first familiar faces that Dick saw on the street, after his return for the vacation, was that of Mr. Carleton, or Dr. Carleton, as he was now. From the point of view of Seaton foot-ball, which was becoming for Dick one of the most important things in life, it was a piece of great good fortune that he happened to catch his friend just at this time, for Dr. Carleton had only a week at his disposal, the interval between the end of his course at the medical school and the beginning of his hospital service, Dick broached the subject immediately, and the very next day they met on the fair-grounds for the first lesson.

"Is that the only ball you brought with you?" asked Dr. Carleton, in dismay, as Dick appeared with a dark, weather-beaten thing, with ends rounded like an egg.

"I've got a brand-new one at the house," answered Dick, "but Curtis made such a row about giving it to me, and insisted so that this was good enough for practice, that I haven't blown the new one up yet."

"It *is* good enough for practice, if by practice you mean mere exercise in kicking," returned Dr. Carleton, "but any really good training for accurate punting is out of the question with a misshapen thing like that. Besides, you ought always to practise under conditions as nearly as possible like those existing in a game, and this can't be the kind of a ball you expect to use."

"I understand," said Dick. "Shall I go back for the new one?"

"We may as well use this, to-day. Now,

the first question is, how do you catch the ball when it is passed to you?"

"With the hands, like this," replied Dick, extending his arms with the palms of the hands near together, straight out from his shoulders.

"That's right, in theory at least. In practice you will find that the ball frequently won't come there. It is often just as well to have it a little lower. What next?"

"Take a short step back with the non-kicking foot, then a longer one forward with the same foot, and swing the kicking foot against the ball."

"That's the Harvard way," laughed Dr. Carleton. "I suppose you got that from Hammond. I used to get my swing by taking two short steps to the side, but your method brings the body forward and has the advantage of quickness; and quickness in getting the kick away is a most vital thing. The loss of a second in handling the ball may mean a blocked kick. What then?"

"Why, just let fly at the ball," said Dick. "I don't know anything else."

"There's a great deal else," replied Dr. Carleton. "In the first place, you must adjust the ball so that it will be in correct position for kicking before it is dropped. The adjustment should be made without losing the first hold, simply by play of the wrists. Considerable practice may be required to master this knack, but once learned it will prevent fumbling as well as save time. Days apparently wasted in practice are well spent if they save seconds in a game. Then the ball should strike squarely on the instep so as to receive a good clean blow."

"In what position?" asked Dick. "I've been told three or four different ways."

"Good punters disagree on that point. My advice is to let the middle of the under side of the ball strike about the middle of instep, with the long axis in the direction in which you are kicking. Adjust the ball carefully, holding it well out before you drop it; the shorter the fall from the hand to the foot, the surer the direction of the kick. And, finally, keep your toe pointed down, not up."

"Why down?" asked Dick.

"Otherwise you will kick high and short, instead of high and long, and waste some of the strength of the kick by striking the ball at two or three different points at the same time, thus bringing into action conflicting forces. Try both ways and see for yourself, first with toe up and then with toe down."

Dick followed directions as well as he could. From the first kick the ball rose straight up, dropping a short distance in front of him. With the toe directed down, the ball went nearly as high but in a much wider circle.

"I see," cried Dick. "It carries the ball forward."

"There's such a thing as getting the ball too far away," said Dr. Carleton. "How far are you to kick?"

"As far as you think your ends can cover," answered Dick, promptly.

"That's right, and it's usually unwise to kick much beyond them, for the opposing full-back would then have a chance to get under way with the ball before they reach him, and so be much harder to stop. The only way to increase your distance is to kick higher, and so give the ends longer time to get down the field."

"It's pretty important, then, to be able to judge the distance, isn't it?"

"It's the most essential thing of all," replied Dr. Carleton. "Whether it is twenty-five or thirty or forty yards, or even more, the back must be able to mete out the distance accurately. The next requirement is absolute steadiness and sureness under all circumstances. Keep your eyes on the ball when you kick, and you won't be tempted to fear the man who is apparently rushing down upon you."

They practised that day on short punts for accuracy, wandering back and forth along an imaginary twenty-yard line. Dick went home feeling that the rudiments of kicking were anything but simple.

The next morning some poles were found to do temporary duty as goal-posts, and the practice went on before these. Toward the end of the exercise, Dr. Carleton tried another kind of punt. The ball rose spinning on its longer axis like a bobbin, and when it came down, it seemed to develop a shoot like the curve of a base-ball or the final swoop of a kite, that made it extremely hard to catch.

"I know those," cried Dick; "Hammond kicked them when he was at Seaton last spring. He called them spirals. How do you do it?"

"If you kick straight forward, the best way is to turn the ball a little across the instep so that the forward end comes inside the line of the foot. The ball will then acquire the spin by sliding down the instep. This method is far surer than that of giving the ball a cross cut as some spectacular players try to do. Keep the toe down. The direction must be got by taking the preliminary step aright. You kick in the direction in which you step."

He came nearer to show more exactly the position of foot and ball, but try as he might, Dick could not imitate him.

"Don't be discouraged. It will take months, perhaps, but you will learn it if you keep trying."

"I wish you would tell me about drop-kicking," said Dick.

"You'd better learn to punt first," replied Dr. Carleton, with a sharpness that brought the blood to the boy's cheek. "Drop-kicking is the last accomplishment for a back to gain, and one which he may never use the whole season through, while steady, accurate, strong punting is in demand in every game from start to finish." Dick said no more about drop-kicking.

So a week passed by. The day before Dr. Carleton left, the two had their last practice.

"I'm gaining in accuracy and control," said Dick, "but I can't put any force into my kick. I suppose I'm not heavy and strong enough."

"Strength isn't everything by any means," returned Dr. Carleton. "There is a great deal more knack in the thing than is generally supposed. There are two or three Harvard men — I think your friend Hammond is among them — who give a kind of quick hard snap with the knee and foot at the end of the swing, that makes a ball fly. The first time I saw it, was the year after I left college, when our team was so badly beaten in New Haven. The Harvard full-back would cover fifty yards with his punts and have his ends waiting for the ball when it came down. If I were beginning again, I'd learn that snap if it took four years."

"How is it done?"

"I really don't know. You'll have to get your Harvard friends to tell you. To-day I want you to try drop-kicking. It's our last chance together, and I may as well tell you what I know about the subject and have you start right. It's mainly a question of hammering away at the ball from all sorts of positions, thousands of times, until your impulses and your muscles correlate."

And then he described the method of dropping the ball, vertically down with the seam in front; and the manner of striking it with the toe, squarely and evenly just as the ball starts from the ground, while the spring of the rebound is still acting. They practised for some time at this, and while Dick strove to follow directions, his attention was seriously diverted by the wonderful skill of his teacher. Whether the kick was high or low, long or short, before the posts or near the edge of the field — the ball obeyed the desires of the kicker like a silent, willing servant. Foot and ball and ground seemed to conspire to make the kick a success. But when Dick tried it, his foot hesitated, the ground rebelled, and the sulky ball bounced off on a tangent, quite away from the direction it was supposed to take.

"It needs time and practice," said Dr. Carleton.

"I'd willingly give years to it if I could get your skill," said Dick, longingly.

Dr. Carleton laughed, pleased at the vehemence of the compliment.

"It really did require years in my case, Dick, and I should like to see you shorten up the term of apprenticeship. You may learn more about punting from your Harvard friends, but I doubt if they can beat us on the drop. When you practise, be careful about three things: Drop exactly vertically, and hit squarely with the toe. Don't swing your foot far back behind you to get momentum; if you do, you'll miss your aim, while the ball will go just as far and much more accurately from a short, quick kick. Hit the ball the moment it touches the ground."

After Dr. Carleton's departure Dick labored away according to directions, with what support he could get from his acquaintances. These, however, had not Dick's stimulus to work, and gradually found the heat and the discomfort too much for their benevolence. By the end of July he had exhausted the whole list of his boy friends. Only little Ned, in whom the small-boy admiration for a big brother burned very strongly, and a lad of Dick's own age across the street continued faithful to him, and made possible his practice during the hot days of midsummer.

One day in August he had a sudden call to the telephone. The message was from Dickinson, who was acting as assistant clerk in a summer hotel near Cleveland, announcing that he had been called home by sickness in his family, and asking whether Dick would not like to take his place while he was gone. The vacation was getting somewhat dull, and Dick welcomed the opportunity to mingle a little real work with the summer's idleness. He accepted on the spot, got his parents' consent, and left by the afternoon train.

He had been at work a few days, long enough to get accustomed to the ropes and to feel a little at home in his surroundings, when he was startled, one morning, by discovering in a party that had just come ashore from a steam-yacht the striking figure and well-remembered face of Hammond. He wondered if the Harvard captain would remember him; but he need have had no uneasiness on this score, for immediately on entering the office, Hammond recognized him and greeted him with a cordiality that made his young admirer's heart leap with delight.

"Still kicking?"

"Yes, as well as I can."

"Did you get any help from Carleton?"

"Yes, indeed; he told me lots of things, but there was one thing he did not know."

"What was that?" asked Hammond, immediately curious.

"He says there is a kind of a snap which you give with the foot at the end of a punt, that he doesn't understand."

The college man was silent a moment, and Dick added, "You didn't tell me anything about it at Seaton."

"No, I didn't," returned Hammond, musing. "Let me see, where are you going to college?"

"To Harvard."

"Are you sure?"

"I've passed most of my examinations already."

"Well, then, come down to Cambridge in the fall, and I'll explain it to you. I can show you the principle in a few minutes, but it requires months to learn to apply it. If we only had a ball, I could show you here."

"I have one in my trunk!" cried Dick, eagerly.

Hammond laughed. "You *are* an enthusiast. Can you get off for half an hour about three?"

"I think so," Dick replied.

"Well, then, be ready at that time. We go off again to-morrow morning, so this will be our only chance."

Dick went out to meet the appointment with heart bubbling over with joyful anticipation. He returned in despair. The directions were simple. He had learned them by heart in five minutes. He saw what Hammond did; he understood the method completely. But his leg and the ball absolutely refused to work together in the way prescribed.

A few days afterward Dickinson came back to his post, and Dick returned home more determined than ever. He kicked whenever and as long as he could get any one to kick with him. His leg became hard and sinewy with muscles like steel. He attained considerable skill in drop-kicking, could place his punts with fair accuracy, and had made decided gains in distance; but that elusive snap continued as impossible as ever.

CHAPTER XXIII

PREPARING FOR THE STRUGGLE

WHAT a hand-shaking there was when the school reassembled that fall! Our friends gathered on the steps after the first "chapel" was over in a group as noisy as any.

"How are you, Jack? Glad to see you again, you scamp! Haven't been off the water a day this summer, have you? You've got a regular sea-dog color on, anyway. Well, Dick, put it there, old boy! All ready for business again, I'll warrant. You look five pounds heavier. And, Ah Sin, too, what an old rascal! I wonder they ever let him come back. Who's this strange young gentleman — the Prep? Why, of course. He really couldn't expect us to recognize him in those long trousers. And here's old John, strutting like a turkey-cock, with 'I'm captain of the eleven' written all over him."

The group broke up, Curtis and Dick walking off together.

"How did you get on with your 'prelims,' John? Hope you got through all right."

"They wouldn't let me try any," answered Curtis, gloomily. "I suppose you passed everything."

"Oh, yes," returned Dick. Then, hastening to change to a more agreeable subject, he added, "What about foot-ball? Are all the squad back?"

"All but O'Neill; we have seven all together. We shall be weak in the line, I'm afraid, unless some heavier men turn up. I've got a big fellow for guard who weighs over two hundred. If we can work him up to play a stiff game, he'll be a great addition. Otherwise the men are going to be pretty light, and they say the Hillbury line is the heaviest they've had for years."

"We may find some unexpectedly good

material among the new fellows," replied Dick. "Dickinson's here, I see."

"Yes, he'll be out this afternoon. We'll put the men on the tackling dummy, and give them some practice in dropping on the ball and breaking through. Be sure you're out early. The coach won't be here until to-morrow."

"What's his name?"

"Murdock. Used to play tackle on the —— College eleven. He ought to help us bring out a strong line if we have any material to work with. How did you come on with the kicking?"

"Pretty well, I think. Carleton helped me a lot, and I fell in with Hammond again during the summer, and he gave me some mighty useful hints. The ball finally got so out of shape I couldn't do anything with it."

"Probably good enough for punting," growled Curtis. "Nobody kicks a ball straight, anyway."

The practice began unpromisingly. Curtis and Melvin played the better for the thought and effort they had expended on the game during the last months, but the rest of the team did not come up to the expectation of the principals. Some were green and clumsy and needed every point that practice and coaching could give; others, who had played before, felt their superiority so keenly that they ceased to exert themselves. They had pledged themselves for the honor of the school to stand together and support the captain in every possible way; to play their hardest on the field as he directed, and off the field to yield strict obedience to the rules of training and conduct. Yet many times they failed most lamentably. It was so very easy to stay up after ten o'clock at night, or yield to the seductions of the soda-fountain or caterer's window, that the best-intentioned would sometimes fail. The coach might plead, and Curtis storm and threaten, but the delinquents, knowing full well that good players could not be immediately manufactured to fill their places, felt no uneasiness for the consequences of their irregularities. Then there were petty jealousies among the candidates — a feeling that the captain was favoring one and opposing another unjustly. By the accumulation of all these troubles, each in itself insignificant, Curtis was vexed and discouraged.

As the time passed by and the team was finally chosen, there were greater trials still to bear. The schoolboys got tired of playing practice games against the first eleven. It was monotonous, ungrateful work to be a target day after day for the strongest players in school, and when the make-up of the team was determined, the unsuccessful candidates usually preferred other employment. Toward the end of the season it was frequently impossible to get out enough extra players to make up an opposing team, though the benches were well filled with idlers. And with all these reasons for discouragement, there were the habitual faultfinders and grumblers who appeared this year in strong force. A few of these were on the team; not, of course, openly critical, but showing by occasional fits of sullenness that they disagreed with playing directions. The most deadly contingent of croakers, however, never played at all. They sat on the seats where they could see all that was done; they had opinions as to every player and every movement, and discoursed on the general subject most frankly and pessimistically. They could not play — so they talked, talked, talked. Long before the season was far enough advanced to give any material for a fair opinion, these wiseacres had decided that Curtis did not know the first thing about running a team. They even doubted his playing ability. Any fool could see, they maintained, that he wasn't at all the man of last year.

It is strange what an influence pompous and ignorant criticism of this kind has on a community of boys. It may be due to their impressible age and the general unsteadiness of boyhood; it may be simply because every boy is averse to being considered less wise in discerning faults than his neighbor. Whatever the reason, such silly talk, though confessedly by incompetent critics, often meets with a very ready assent. The opinions of the carpet knights did not, in this case, entirely prevail in school. John Curtis was too fine a player, and the team too good, for that. But the school lost confidence in the team; and the players, though they did not confess it, were losing confidence in themselves.

Dick, during all this time, had given himself heart and soul to the cause, aiding the captain and coach at every possible point. And Curtis needed both help and encouragement. The loss of school confidence weighed heavily upon him; in practice games the team had fallen somewhat below the scores of Hillbury; his labors were unappreciated; the school spirit seemed dead. But Dick would not allow him to despair. If plans were needed, Melvin furnished them; if a practice match showed a weakness in the defence, Melvin was ready with the means for strengthening it; if a player got sulky or rebellious, it was Melvin again who worked him around. Without being himself captain, it would have been impossible for him to do more. He sometimes wondered at the change that had come over him since his first season. His easy self-complacency had disappeared, as the responsibility had settled upon his shoulders. Face to face with increasing difficulties, his determination to win only grew the stronger.

This change in Dick's character was not entirely due to the struggles and lessons of the last year, or to the sobering effect of responsibility. The very nature of the sport he was interested in contributed essentially to his manliness and self-control. In our national game of base-ball, skill is of first importance, and after skill, coolness and agility. Muscular force, mental quickness, unity of operation, Saxon grit, play but a minor part in the final result. Lank legs and hollow chests are no obstacles to success. Strict training, even, may be dispensed with. In fact, many of the best ball-players of the country are notoriously men of loose morals and no education.

Foot-ball demands much more of its devotees. It is a battle for the strong, a race for the swift, a war game for the soldier spirit. The dolt and the weakling, the nervous and the timid, are unceremoniously crowded out. Every man must be physically brawny; but more than this, if his team is really to be a success, he must sink his own individuality in the whole, and treble his own strength by wisely drawing on the strength of others. The campaign of a great foot-ball team is a schooling in itself.

The climax of discouragement came when Dickinson hurt his ankle, about a fortnight before the great game. The runner had been gaining steadily in school favor, and now many who spoke despairingly of the eleven in general had still hope of some brilliant achievement from the star in the manifold chances of the game. Dick himself had not shared in these rosy expectations, and so was not so much cast down. He had long seen that the frailty of the sprinter more than offset the advantage of his speed, and he felt that it was a wrong policy to put much trust in a man, however wonderful, who might succumb in the first scrimmage. Curtis, however, was sadly upset.

"If Dickinson can't play, what *are* we to do for backs?" he exclaimed dismally, the night after the accident. "You are the only man left who has any speed, and we can't use you all the time. That Hillbury line will be terribly hard to make holes through."

"You'll have to get the jump on them, then," replied Dick. "That's the only way to beat a heavy line. And as far as backs are concerned, I don't think we are so badly off. Hoyt and Vincent are both playing a steady, hard game. They aren't brilliant, but they hold the ball well, strike the line hard, and don't fumble. Do you know that we haven't been kicking much lately?"

"What's the use of it? You simply give the ball to the other side. Kick only when you have to, is my idea—and Murdock's, too."

"Murdock is prejudiced," retorted Dick. "These rush-line players always think rushing is the whole game. Hammond and Carleton don't think so, and they know more about foot-ball than all of us together. I believe there are times when it is wiser to kick on the second down. It rests the backs, and gives you a chance to gain a lot of ground at a stroke."

"Or lose the ball, as usually happens," replied the obstinate Curtis.

"Another thing,—we ought to try oftener for goals from the field. We may work down near the Hillbury goal and be stopped. That occurs lots of times. If we are used to kicking drops and holding for drops, there will always be a reasonable chance of scoring. Early in the season I could kick a goal twice out of every three tries, from almost anywhere along the thirty-five-yard line. With practice, I think I could do even better."

"That's all very well for men like Hammond and Carleton, but we don't belong to their class. I haven't seen a goal from the field in a Hillbury game since I began to play. You can't keep cool enough to do it."

"I think it can be done," replied Dick, "and I'll tell you what, John, the game will be close, and we can't afford to lose a single chance. Our fellows are discouraged, and a good deal will depend on what we do early in the game. If we make the first score, we can win; if we don't, we shall probably lose."

"I know it," groaned John; "but we're doing the best we can, aren't we?"

"Not unless we are ready for a goal from the field whenever the chance comes. We ought to practise on it until we are sure of it within the twenty-five-yard line."

"Practise it, then, if you think it's so necessary. I've no faith in it myself."

For once Curtis and the grandstand critics were on the same side. Neither had any faith in Melvin's ability. Before the week was out, however, Curtis was enthusiastic, and the croakers were, for a time at least, silenced. Dick's skill was far greater than had been suspected. "Think of but two things," Dr. Carleton had taught him, —"the ball and the goal-posts. Forget that there are men in front of you." And Dick, who, like every good sportsman, was so wrapped up in the game he was playing as to be incapable of fear, followed these directions to the letter. With men rushing fiercely down upon him, he dropped as safely and as surely as when he practised goals alone with his fellow-backs. In the last practice game, before the great match, there were two goals from the field to Seaton's credit when the playing time expired.

But what pleased him even more in that last practice game was the strange knack of punting, the long-sought and elusive snap of the knee with toe extended, that came to him as if by inspiration in the heat of the contest. It was a heavy college team that played them that day. The brawny, burly collegians would sometimes go plunging through the Seaton line as if there were no opponents to stop them, and often Seaton had to kick in self-defence, and kick quickly, too, or tamely drop on the ball twenty yards behind the line. The first time he punted under this stress, Dick felt that he struck the ball in a new way; he was as surprised as the college full-back to see it go sailing beyond the full-back's head. The second time, as he felt the ball roll off his instep, and recognized the peculiar spin with which it seemed to bore its way through the air against the wind, he was sure he had the Hammond kick, and the delight in his heart put strength and elasticity into his knee.

The effect of these goals from the field on the feeling of the school was remarkable.

The despondency was suddenly transformed into confidence. The sprinter star had set, but in its stead had risen a new light which, to the Seaton student body, now grown more patriotic with the approach of the momentous day, seemed to show the way to certain triumph. And Dick, who understood fully the uncertainties of the situation, and knew that, whether his chances were good or poor, he would be cursed for all failures, found himself burdened with a very unfair share of responsibility.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE GREAT GAME BEGINS

On the morning of the game, when Philip returned to his room after the first recitation, he was surprised to find his uncle awaiting him. Dr. Carleton had come on from New York with the double purpose of visiting his nephew and seeing the contest of the day, in which he was interested both as graduate and as instructor for a time of one of the important participants. Of course the lad was delighted to have his uncle's company, and he whiled away the uneasy morning in showing the improvements about the school since Dr. Carleton's time.

The train for Hillbury, where the game was to take place this year, left early enough to make it possible for play to begin promptly at two. Dr. Carleton and Phil took a seat in the rear of the car, which commanded a view of all the occupants. Their car, like the rest, was crowded. Some seats ahead sat several of the team, maintaining, in the midst of the boisterous confusion, a nervous silence very expressive of their feelings. Dick came back several times to say a few words to his friends, but he was clearly not at his ease, and had to exert himself to keep his thoughts on the subject of discussion.

The rest of the company were troubled by no disturbing apprehensions. They laughed and talked and cheered, wholly without respect for the exhortations of their leaders, who upbraided them bitterly for not sparing their throats for the more serious duties of the day. Ribbons were flying, banners waving, decorated canes pounding the floor with little restraint, all the way to Hillbury. They might return in a different spirit; why not celebrate while they could?

Philip, though as excited as the rest, was too much occupied in describing his comrades to find opportunity for much noise-making. Robert Carleton listened with smiling sympathy to all the little fellow's impetuous talk, not a whit behind him in anxiety and hope. The memories of days gone by, when he began his own athletic experiences in this same school, and with companions just like these, crowded to his mind. And while Phil prattled on, he found himself arguing again from the standpoint of a mature man, the pros and cons of the athletic question. There was sometimes danger, there was temptation to excess, to neglect of serious duties, to a wrong valuation of things worth striving for; but on the other hand, the splendid, robust life, innocent because it was strong, the manly joy in honorable battle, the peculiar discipline of mind and body and character, which are beyond the power of library or recitation room to give — are these not well worth their cost? "Non-competitive athletics!" He sniffed at the idea. "Mere motions and pasteboard, like a stage feast!"

His meditations were interrupted by the arrival of the train at Hillbury. The boys poured forth, and, in a broad, beribboned stream, took a hasty course toward the grounds where the game was to be played. The other spectators from Seaton followed at a soberer pace. Phil's mind was distracted between a natural impulse to go with the crowd and the desire to make the most of the few hours he could spend with his uncle.

"You had better come with me, Philip, for the first part of the game. I have two reserved seats — on the Hillbury side of the field, to be sure, but very good places from which to see. I want some one to support me among the enemy."

"But I ought to help cheer, Uncle Rob; the team won't do well unless every one supports them, and perhaps Dick may need me for something."

"If that's the case, you had better go," said Dr. Carleton, laughing. "I shouldn't want to keep you from assisting Dick."

Then, as it suddenly occurred to Philip that he might not be showing proper attention to his uncle, who was his visitor, and under his care, he changed his view with boylike suddenness and concluded: "I reckon I'll stay, Uncle Rob, for a while at any rate. They won't want me for some time yet."

But when they came to crowd into the narrow measure of seat which had been reserved for the two tickets, Phil regretted that he had not gone with his schoolfellows. A big, stout woman sat just above him, occupying with her gown, and the shawl which she had carefully tucked about her feet, a good share of his place. She testily made room for him, or at least sufficient room to enable him to possess himself of the outer edge of his seat, where he braced himself with his feet into an awkward position, that was neither leaning nor sitting nor standing. Beyond Dr. Carleton sat a middle-aged man with his daughter; next to Philip, several young women. The man was curious as to the game, but very ignorant of the details, and prone to ask what appeared to Phil strange questions, such as: "Are they playing now?" "In which direction is Seaton trying to carry the ball?" "Why does the big man in the centre have the ball so much?" It seemed to Phil that a person who knew so little of what was going on before him might better have stayed at home; but Dr. Carleton evidently did not think so, for he answered very clearly and pleasantly, as if the questions were reasonable. What distressed the youngster most, however, as he waited impatiently for the game to begin, was the conversation of the Hillbury sympathizers about him. It soon appeared that the fat woman above, and the young girls at his side, were of the same party. They discoursed over his head, with supreme indifference to his existence, about the various people they saw and the prospects of the game, concerning the result of which they had no manner of doubt.

"I hope Mr. Bird is going to play. He looks just lovely in foot-ball clothes," said one.

"I hope so, too," added another; "but I heard he hurt his shoulder the other day."

"O dear, did he? I'm afraid it's an awfully rough game. I shan't dare to look at it."

"He didn't do it playing foot-ball; he fell off his bicycle coming down Linden Street last Wednesday."

At this, the whole flock giggled ecstatically, while Phil dug his hands into his ulster pockets and shot a glance of disgust along the bench.

"What is it that amuses you so, young ladies?" called the elder woman, in measured tones.

"Oh, we were just laughing at those awkward Seaton fellows over there. Don't you think they look dreadfully common, Miss Mappin?"

"Probably all kinds of young men are to be found at Seaton, Miss Albee, but I understand that the students there are much wilder and more vicious than those at Hillbury. I wonder that the Faculty here allow these games."

There flashed into Philip's mind the stories he had heard of the rough behavior of Hillbury students in bygone games, and how even a Hillbury professor had taken a hand in a street row which the Hillbury following had provoked, but, fortunately, the boy was wise enough to keep his thoughts to himself.

"I wish they would commence!" said girl number three. "You are going to let us go out to the celebration afterward, aren't you, Miss Mappin?"

"We shall see," replied the chaperone, cautiously.

The cheering now began on both sides of the field. "There they come, there they come, Uncle Bob!" cried Phil, standing up in his eagerness. "That's Hillbury ahead. See how new their suits are. I don't believe they ever wore them before. And there come our fellows, too. There's Dick with Curtis, that big fellow in front. I wish I were down there to cheer."

"A sturdy set, I am sure," replied his uncle. "They look as if they might accomplish something."

"The Hillbury line is awfully heavy," said Phil.

The players took their places amidst a deafening roar of cheers. It was Seaton's kick-off. A Hillbury back caught the ball and started to run, but the Seaton ends bore down upon him, and Curtis, who was just behind, swept him into his grasp, and they went down together.

"That's old John," said Phil, proudly. "He's always there"

"What a shame," remarked girl number two, "to get their new suits so dirty!"

The player was on his feet in a moment, and his side was pushing its way along, making ground slowly but safely by sending its heavy men crashing into the Seaton line. The noise of cheering about their seats was so overwhelming that our two friends did not try to exchange words; indeed, they were both so much engaged in seeking to discover where lay the superior strength that they did not care to talk. Across the field came the distinct sound from the Seaton throats, weakened by distance but clear and in unison: —

"Rah, rah, rah! Rah, rah, rah!
Seaton, Seaton! Rah, rah, rah!"

varied by: —

"Hullabaloo hooray! hooray!
Hullabaloo hooray! hooray!
Hoo ray! *Hoo* ray!
Seaton, Seaton! Red and gray!"

"We've got some better cheers," said Phil, in his uncle's ear, "and some songs, but we're keeping them for the last."

"They won't have a chance to use them, I'm afraid, unless those fellows stop falling back. Still, Hillbury can't keep up that kind of play forever; they are not gaining much now. Ah! Seaton has the ball at last! Now, what are they going to do? — They won't fail for lack of cheering, at any rate," he added, as the noise from the Seaton side suddenly increased.

They watched a few minutes in silence. A lucky run around the end gave the Seatonians ten yards; another through left tackle added three more; then the ball was lost.

"O dear!" said Philip, nervously, "I never saw Todd do that before. I don't see how he can fumble at such a time." And then a few minutes after: "Look, look! Uncle Rob; we've got the ball again! See, Curtis is holding it between his feet."

"They'd better kick," said Dr. Carleton; "they're in a very dangerous place." Almost as he spoke the ball rose from behind the line, and sailed through the air in a long, sweeping arch, passing just over the head of the Hillbury full-back, who had not anticipated so long a punt. He had just time to get the ball when Watson pulled him down.

"Beautiful!" exclaimed Dr. Carleton. "That was about as nearly perfect as a punt from that spot could be. How the boy has gained in his kicking since last summer!"

"He's a wonder," asserted Phil, proudly. "I believe he's improved more in the last two weeks than in all the rest of the season. You ought to see him kick a drop."

"I should very much like to," returned his uncle, with a smile; "the sooner the better."

The Hillbury boys pressed forward again. They did not gain fast, but they clung to the ball, and with exasperating persistence held to their purpose, slowly approaching their opponents' goal-line, the crossing of which meant a touch-down for Hillbury. It was a slow and wearisome process, especially for our two anxious spectators.

"That is apparently their whole game," said Dr. Carleton; "just to hammer away at tackle and guard, a yard or two at a time. I don't believe it will pay in the end, but they are gaining by it now."

"They're right at the line now," said Phil, dismally. "It looks as if they were going to get over. It's awfully hard work to watch, isn't it?" and he rubbed his hand nervously across his forehead.

"They will make it, I am afraid. Yes, there they go, just at the edge."

There was a great outburst of noise all along the Hillbury side of the field, with a general blowing of horns and waving of banners. The old cheers were discarded, and in their place the jubilant Hillburyites began to repeat a peculiar jingle which, though it could not readily be made out, was said to be: —

"What have we done!
What have we done!
Scored five points, and the work's begun!"

On the Seaton side silence reigned.

"It's too bad, Phil, but we need not be

discouraged," said Dr. Carleton, who was not so much cast down as his nephew. "It was only a touch-down, after all! They did not kick the goal. Seaton has still fifteen minutes in this half in which to score."

"If they only could!" said the disconsolate Philip.

The ball was again brought to the middle of the field. The kick-off was well calculated. The ball landed a little beyond the ten-yard line, where the Hillbury back caught it and succeeded in dodging his way ten yards up the field. Hard rushing carried it twenty yards farther, and then the Seaton line rallied and Hillbury was forced to kick. Dick caught the ball on the bounce, and sent it spinning back with that treacherous twist he had striven so hard to master. The return was unexpected. The Hillbury forwards were already halfway up the field, and their back, misjudging the ball, let it slip through his hands. The error was fatal, for before he could retrieve himself, a Seatonian was hugging the ball on the ground.

"Thatcher!" cried Phil, squirming on his seat. "Isn't he quick? Why, that's a gain of forty yards!"

The troop across the field woke up again and bellowed cheers, while their team pushed eagerly on into the enemy's territory. The Hillbury team was falling slowly back.

"There isn't much more time," said Dr. Carleton, nervously turning his watch over and over in his hand, "and they have at least twenty yards to make. I am very much afraid they won't do it." Then as he continued watching, "Dick seems to have dropped back, and the ends, too; he is going to try for a goal!" They both held their breath in suspense as they saw the ball come back, but it was only for a moment. Under the well-directed kick the ball rose with no uncertainty as to its course. Straight over the cross-bar it sailed, tumbling end over end in its haste

— a goal from the field beyond doubt or cavil.

"Why, how funny!" said girl number one. "That ball went right between those posts!"

Phil was well-nigh delirious with joy. He jumped up and down on the bench, sat on the fat woman's feet, and trod on the skirts of girl number four, who was his immediate neighbor. In the storm of indignation which this unintentional misconduct aroused, he wanted to climb down and slip over to the other side of the field, where he should be free to show his delight in a natural way; but his uncle, who was explaining to the inquisitive gentleman that a touch-down counts five and a goal from the field five, so that neither side was ahead, kept tight hold of him and would not let him go.

"Wait a bit, Phil," said Dr. Carleton, finally; "they will be through in a minute more, and then you can go. I want to send word to Dick. Congratulate him for me, and tell him the Hillbury full-back seems to me rather shaky, and the right end is certainly weak. I think it will pay to do more kicking."

Just then the referee called time, and Phil hastened away.

CHAPTER XXV

THE FINAL TEST

At the expiration of the ten minutes, Philip, somewhat to his uncle's surprise, returned to his seat. Dr. Carleton greeted him, "I thought you were not coming back."

"I had to come with Dick's message, anyway, and I may as well stay here with you. Dick says they are going to win this half; they are as fresh as can be, and have lots of sand."

"Did you tell him what I said about the end and the full-back?"

"Yes; and he thinks you are right about the kicking. Curtis is going to try it, anyway."

The ball was now put in motion again. Dr. Carleton had taken advantage of the intermission to make clear to the old gentleman that the game was divided into two parts of thirty-five minutes each, with a resting period between, and to answer various other questions which required more elaborate explanation than could be made in the midst of the game. So, for a time at least, he could give his undivided attention to the operations on the field. It was apparent at the outset that the Seaton players had gained in strength and courage since the intermission. There were an energy and a vim in their game which contrasted most favorably with their previous efforts. The two spectators watched them for a time without a word.

"They have the winning spirit, Phil," said Dr. Carleton, at last.

"What's that?" asked the boy.

"I can't explain exactly how it shows itself, but it is there and I recognize it. It's a fleeting thing, though; a little carelessness or discouragement, and away it goes. There! they've lost the ball."

"Hillbury will have to kick, anyway, so we shall have it again."

"Perhaps so, but it is a risk."

Hillbury kicked. Vincent, the Seaton half-back, clutched the ball, and succeeded, with the help of his interference, in squirming his way up the field again a dozen yards.

"See that!" cried Phil, eagerly; "he gained like everything."

"They'll lose it again before long."

But the next movement belied Dr. Carleton's words. The ball went to Dickinson. Todd at the Seaton end took the Hillbury half-back, the Seaton quarter banged against the weak Hillbury end; Dick plunged into the opposing quarter, and Dickinson, shaking off the grasping hands, flew by the line right on toward the Hillbury goal, with no one behind who could catch him, and only the Hillbury full-back to stop him in front.

What happened then might seem incredible to one who did not know the man and the deceptive character of his speed. As

Dickinson swept diagonally down the field, and the full-back worked over toward the side-line to force him out, the runner swerved to the other side, shot by his opponent before he seemed to be within reach, struck down the arms of the Hillbury tackle who dived for the flying legs, and then sped on, alone and at ease, to the enemy's goal. The full-back must have pocketed him if he had rightly judged the Seatonian's speed, but Dickinson was going so much faster than he seemed to be, that the full-back did not even come within grasping distance; while the only other dangerous foe was opportunely bowled over by Watson, who, like every good end, had a way of being where he was most wanted and always close to the ball. The touch-down was between the posts, whence only desperate bungling could miss a goal.

"Well, I never saw that done before!" said Dr. Carleton, speaking as he supposed to Philip. But the seat beside him was vacant. Philip had bolted, without a word, to add his proper mite to the explosion of cheers that rose from the benches across the field.

It was now Seaton's turn to change cheers: —

"Seaton! Seaton!
Can't be beaten!"

rang out over the field, kept up for several minutes in succession, but giving way later to a peculiarly scoffing yell that penetrated with all its derisive force to where Mr. Carleton was sitting: —

"Tche-he, tche-ha, a-ha, ha, ha!
Seaton, Seaton, rah! rah! rah!"

But Hillbury was not yet beaten. Her pluck was as good as ever, and the heavy men in the line, furious with shame that their opponents had won a goal so easily, took their places behind the ball with a savage determination to make their strength tell. Dickinson got the ball on the kick-off, but the Hillbury giants pulled him to the ground before he could get under way, and piled half a ton of solid bodies upon him to make sure that he was safe.

When the heap was cleared away and the Seaton runner pulled to his feet, there was a sudden call of time. Poor Dickinson could not stand. His ankle had given way again. Stalwart friends carried him to the side-lines, limp and faint, disgusted to be banished from the field at the moment of his triumph, and discouraged at the prospect of weeks of ankle-tending and petting that were before him. Yet there was not a boy on all the Seaton benches who would not have sacrificed two sound ankles for Dickinson's glorious five minutes on the field.

And then Dick began to punt. The Hillbury full-back was growing "rattled," and the soaring kicks, that were so long in corkscrewing their way down, and had such a villanous trick of shooting out of their course when they got near the ground, he could not hold more than half the time. If he failed, the Seaton end was always underneath, and had the ball with forty yards or more of clear gain. Seaton now kicked on the second down, and always to the same nervous back. And when he finally missed a catch on the ten-yard line, it seemed almost easy to rush the ball across for a third score.

There is nothing so disheartening to a rush-line as to have a fumbling back. Of what use is it to struggle for ground by the yard, when the full-back loses it in eight-rod lengths? The dreaded Hillbury heavy-weights weakened and lagged, not because they were inferior to the men in front of them, but because they had lost confidence in their backs. Their battle now was dogged but hopeless. Again Dick tried a drop-kick. So true was the direction, that an involuntary yell of joy rose from the Seaton benches while the ball was in mid-air. The shout was premature, however, and ceased as abruptly as it began, for the ball fell a little short, passing a couple of feet below the cross-bar, and giving the Hillburyites another chance to retrieve themselves.

Ten minutes later, however, Hillbury was again fighting desperately before her goal-posts on the fifteen-yard line, with the ball again in the enemy's hands. The Seaton ends and halves had already dropped back to guard the kicking lane. Dick stood with arms stretched forward to receive the ball. The time was short, measured now by seconds, and the line heaved and wabbled as the Hillbury centre trio sought to kill time and prevent the pass. But John steadied himself and shot the ball back. Dick caught it, dropped it, felt it strike squarely and evenly against his toe, and knew without following it with his eyes that it had gone the way he had meant it to take.

A moment after, the referee's whistle put an end to the play. The game was over, and the Seaton victory complete. What the score was, let the reader reckon for himself.

The crowd of Hillbury people ebbed silently away. The horns disappeared, the banners were furled; Seaton was left to rejoice alone in the victory.

Phil walked down to the station with Dr. Carleton and Dick, never so supremely happy in his life before. And when the big coach with the team stopped as it passed them, and cheered the walking member with all the vigor that joy and enthusiasm could put into weary lungs, Phil and his uncle felt as proud as if the cheers were meant for them.

"Well, Dick," said Dr. Carleton, some minutes later, as he stood on the platform waiting for the Boston train which left a little before the Seaton special, "you've given me one of the most delightful afternoons of my life. I felt as if I were playing with you all the time. There never was such punting on a school field. Seaton and I are both vain over you today."

"I'm getting a good deal of credit that doesn't belong to me," answered Dick. "Without your coaching last summer and the help Hammond gave me, I shouldn't have accomplished much."

"Harvard and Yale make a strong combination," said Dr. Carleton, smiling. "Unfortunately, they seldom pull together."

"It seems to me that all the real success I've had I owe to you," Dick went on. "You brought me here, and enabled me to stay when I had fooled away my first chance, and taught me the secret of kicking, and set me up in school. I wish I knew how to show you my gratitude."

The engine-bell rang, and Dr. Carleton stepped aboard the train. "There's only one way to do that," he called back gayly from the platform; "come to Yale, and I'll call it square."

CHAPTER XXVI

CONCLUSION

"YOU'VE cost me five dollars to-day, my boy," said Martin, with his usual grin, as he took an authoritative place among the hoarse rooters who clustered about Dick and Curtis on the way home. "When you remember how I helped you to that ten last year, it seems hardly like gratitude. But you did it handsomely, Dick, and I'll forgive you as I always have to do."

Melvin smiled without reply. Well as he knew Martin, he was never certain of understanding him.

"I don't believe I shall bet any more," added the collegian. "Association with such a strenuous person as you has rather spoiled me for the vices of the idle. I'm thinking of accomplishing something serious myself. The disease is catching."

The bystanders laughed. The joke was obscure, but coming from Martin it must be funny. Dick, who saw no joke and knew that Martin was serious more often than his fellows generally supposed, gave a quick glance at the graduate's face and a hearty wring to his hand.

Philip Poole came pushing through from another car.

"Look here, Phil; here's Martin!"

Phil's face glowed with joy, as he grasped the graduate's hand. "Wasn't it great, Martin? Did you ever see a game like it?"

"Never. In my time we used to rush the ball down the field by superior strength. We never were mean enough to rattle a full-back and then punt over his head."

The jeers with which this opinion was received suddenly died away as Dick said very soberly: —

"I'm really sorry for that full-back.

What an awfully unhappy time he must be having!"

"It wasn't his fault, entirely," said Todd. "I don't blame a man who isn't used to them for muffing those cursed spirals. I never could hold them."

"It was our good kicking, not the Hillbury fumbling, that won the game," added Curtis.

"That's it," reiterated Martin. "And to think a man can kick like that, and still get A's on examinations! But you always were a lucky fellow, Dick, even to getting out of scrapes."

"No thanks to you," grinned John.

"Oh, we were a mutual blessing," returned Martin, "only Dick always appropriated the credit for what was good and left me the responsibility for the bad. But we'll let bygones be bygones."

Martin was the leader in the festivities that night, — a wise leader, too, who voiced the joy of all, yet kept the overflowing spirits within proper bounds. When all was over, he went home with Dick and helped the exhausted hero into bed.

"I'm sorry I haven't a room for you," said Dick, who could hardly keep his eyes open. "If it were any other time, I'd give you my bed."

"Nonsense!" replied Martin. "I've a room at the hotel. I just wanted to show you proper honor. I'm off now."

Dick put out his hand. Martin took it and held it a moment before he continued: —

"And one thing more."

"What's that?" drawled the sleepy fellow.

"Those" — he hesitated a little — "adventures of last year, and the rather contemptible part I sometimes had in them, — they're still on my conscience. You've forgiven me, I hope?"

"Why, what a question!" said Melvin, rousing himself. "Of course I have."

"It was mean of me, I know, but I think I did you some good." And then, after what seemed to be a little struggle, "I know you did me a great deal. Good night."

It was not until the following year, when Dick entered college, that he understood fully what Martin meant. His sophomore friend was still the merry, entertaining fellow whom he had known at school, but he had developed on a very different side. There had entered into his life a moral vigor, a spirit of earnestness, and a sense of responsibility that had seemed entirely lacking before. Dick now saw clearly that the desperate battle of his first year at school had not been to himself alone. Unwittingly he had roused Martin from his indolence, and inspired him with a desire to play a more serious, more manly part in the life which lay before him.

Dick entered college with a reputation securely established. Smiled upon by the Varsity captain, patronized by the coaches, hailed by the college generally as a coming man, he started on his career with every chance for failure. That he did not run

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to meet this failure, but modestly took his place in the ranks and quietly won his spurs anew, was not due to any shrewdness on his part; it was the effect of his school experiences. In the first year, he had learned caution; in the second, to labor ungrudgingly and with all his intelligence on the task in hand — and it was to these lessons he owed his college success, which came at its own time and in its own way.

But college life and college success were still months distant, veiled even to the boy's eager imagination. In the meantime school had new lessons to teach and new experiences to offer. For the story of Dick in a new office, which sorely tried his devotion and energy; of Dickinson as captain of the Seaton track team; of Phil in his effort to win a place on the school nine; and of the clever new boy Varrell, who became before the school year was over Melvin's most intimate friend, — the reader is referred to MAKING THE NINE.

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